Buddha and Bodhisattva

A HINDU VIEW

A K BISWAS

Following a concise narration of the Buddha's life and message in the first two chapters, the thesis in this book seeks to establish that the Buddha's original message was Vedantic. The *heravada* drift, away from the mother-church of Hinduism, was eventually reversed by the homecoming syncretism of the *Mahayana*.

The *pratyutpannavastu* (context) of the *Jataka* anecdotes have been integrated with the life and message of the Buddha. The Bodhisattva concept of a spiritual aspirant blossoming into a saviour of mankind is closely parallel to those of the *Saptarshi* and *Avatara* in Hinduism.

Swami Vivekananda has been hailed as the Buddha's Spirit reborn in the modern era. The last chapter sums up a Hindu view of the spiritual and socials message of the Buddha and Bodhisattva.

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BUDDHA AND BODHISATTVA
—A HINDU VIEW

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—A HINDU VIEW

By

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HUMBLY DEDICATED

ओं स्थापकाय च धर्मस्य सर्वधर्मस्वरुपिणे
अवतारवरिष्ठाय रामकृष्णाय ते नमः

Preface

A few introductory remarks may be made to justify the publication of another book on the Buddha. The wonderful message of the great Hindu, 'The Light of Asia', came to be nearly forgotten in the land of his birth, twenty-three centuries after his advent. Then, in the 19th century A.D., Burnouf, Faussböll, Oldenberg, Rhys Davids and several other European scholars unearthed, translated and edited the Pālī canons. Some of them wrongly concluded from the Theravada (nick-named as Hinayana) texts that the early Buddhism was a radical departure from the Hinduism. Fortunately, however, the discovery of the Sanskrit Mahayana literature revealed the closeness between Buddhism, Shaivism and the Vedanta doctrine.

During our recent era, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Coomaraswamy, Radhakrishnan, etc., have strongly emphasized that the Buddha did not propound any new religion—his original message was essentially Vedantic. An attempt has been made in this book to project their well-considered views.

After briefly narrating the Buddha's life and message in the first two chapters, we have concentrated, in the third chapter, on elucidating and resolving the controversies regarding his message.

A sadly neglected field of research is the *integration* of the Bodhisattva doctrine with the Buddha's life and message. The Jataka anecdotes are often treated as if these are mere stories like *Aesop's Fables*, and do not throw a flood of light on the human qualities of Gautama Buddha and his views regarding the human society. Chapter 4 seeks to fill this lacuna in the literature on the Buddha. Ten typical anecdotes ('Bodhisattva Gems') are presented in the Appendix.

The Bodhisattva concept of a spiritual aspirant raising himself to the level of a 'Saviour', is human and yet divine, and therefore represents an eternal principle. We have indicated in chapter 5, how India has witnessed the wonderful saga of religious syncretism, through evolution of ideas on Saptarshi, Avatara and Bodhisattva. The Mahayana movement, having contributed to this evolution of ideas, can legitimately claim to be closer to the original tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism, than its Theravada counterpart.

A Hindu believes in the reincarnation of the 'Saviour', and the present author is neither apologetic nor hesitant in subscribing to the deeply-held view that the Buddha has been re-born in the recent era as Swami Vivekananda (chapter 6).

The last (*i.e.*, seventh) chapter seeks to provide a total estimate of the Buddha and Bodhisattva messages—not only in spiritual terms, but also in the context of the current needs of the human society in general, and the Indian society in particular.

On the various topics discussed in the book, there is a consensus of opinion, but no unanimity of views amongst the Hindu intellectuals and saints. As a matter of fact, we do not have *the* (singular) Hindu view on any issue; Hinduism represents a family or plurality of views with a certain underlying unity. Therefore, the author has presented *a* Hindu viewpoint, *which is his own*, endorsing the noble pronouncements, and rejecting the sectarian, pro-caste and anti-Buddha statements from some esteemed Hindus.

The author asserts that Gautama Buddha and Swami Vivekananda stand unique amidst the galaxy of saints, emphasizing love and universal brotherhood based upon objectivity and knowledge or *jñāna*, rather than devotion or *bhakti* to a personal God. Both stood for the anti-privilege, egalitarian and monistic tenets of the Vedanata, which are yet to influence our global society in a comprchensive manner. The author humbly dedicates this book to the sacred remembrance of Sri Ramakrishna, whose message is in consonance with the Vedantic stand, and yet delves deep in the realms of *bhakti* and *sevā*.

The author is indebted to several monks of the Ramakrishna Order—Swami Apurvānanda, Swami Ranganāthānanda, to name a few—for the inspiration received from them in writing this book.

The author acknowledges the assistance received from his wife, Sulekha, regarding the appreciation of some Sanskrit texts and words. The author's father-in-law Mr. Dhinesh Chandra Roy Bardhan, kindly made several valuable comments and suggestions towards the improvement of the manuscript.

In the first four chapters of this book, most of the references are from standard Buddhist texts and given in parentheses. In the next three chapters, however, discussions spill over to non-Buddhist literatures, and the references have been cited in the footnotes.

Copious citations have been provided from the outstanding book 'The Gospel of Buddha' by Paul Carus. J.E. Jennings bemoaned that Carus had included references from the Mahayana texts, but this merely shows the unique non-sectarian spirit of the author, which was warmly approbated by Swami Vivekananda.

Diacritical marks have been used, but sparingly, out of mercy on the Press. We hope that the readers would recognise Gītā as Gita and Shankara as Śaṅkara, etc. In most instances, the Pālī words or names have been Sanskritized to convey distinct meanings, *e.g.*, Nirvāṇa (Nibbāna), Mārga (Māgga), Anāthapindada (Anāthapindika), Sāriputra (Sāriputta), Unmādayanti (Ummadanti), etc.

I apologise for the mistakes which might have crept in this book, and hope, that the esteemed readers would assist me in removing these errors before the preparation of the next edition.

A.K. BISWAS

I.I.T., KANPUR
1986

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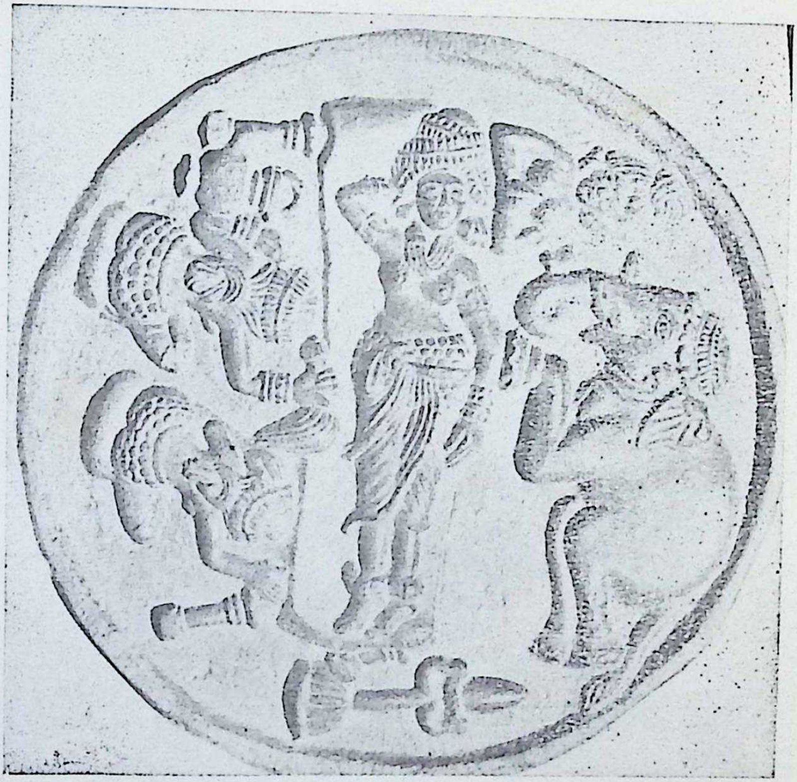

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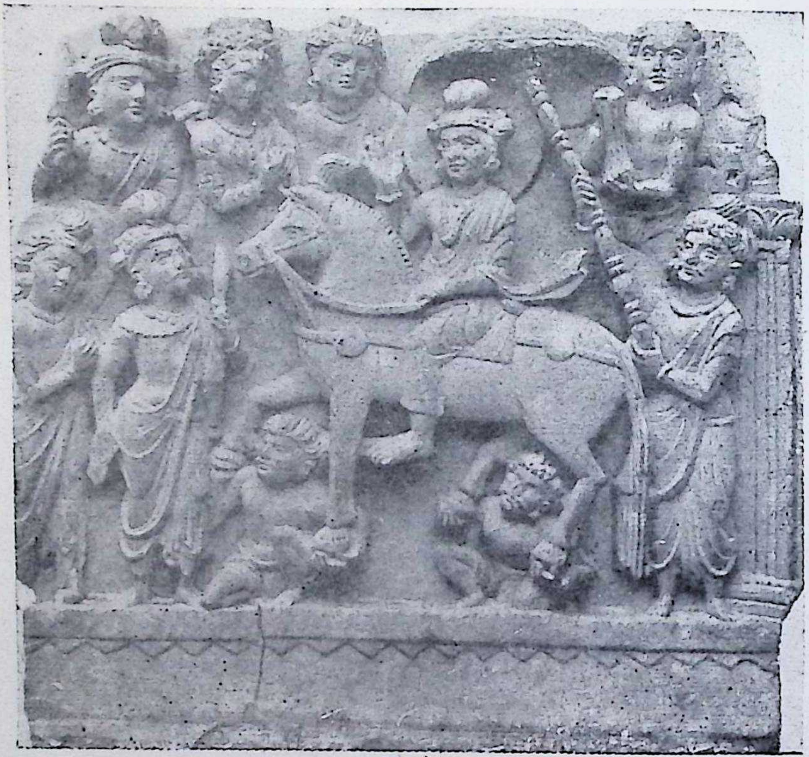

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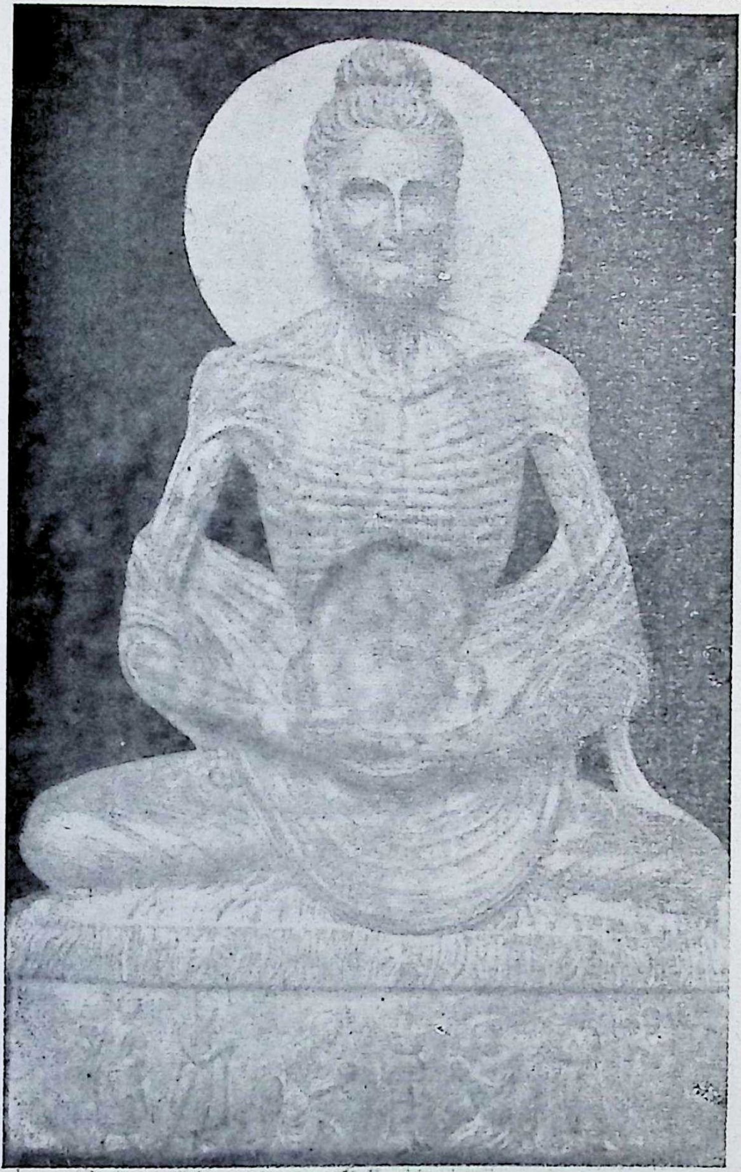

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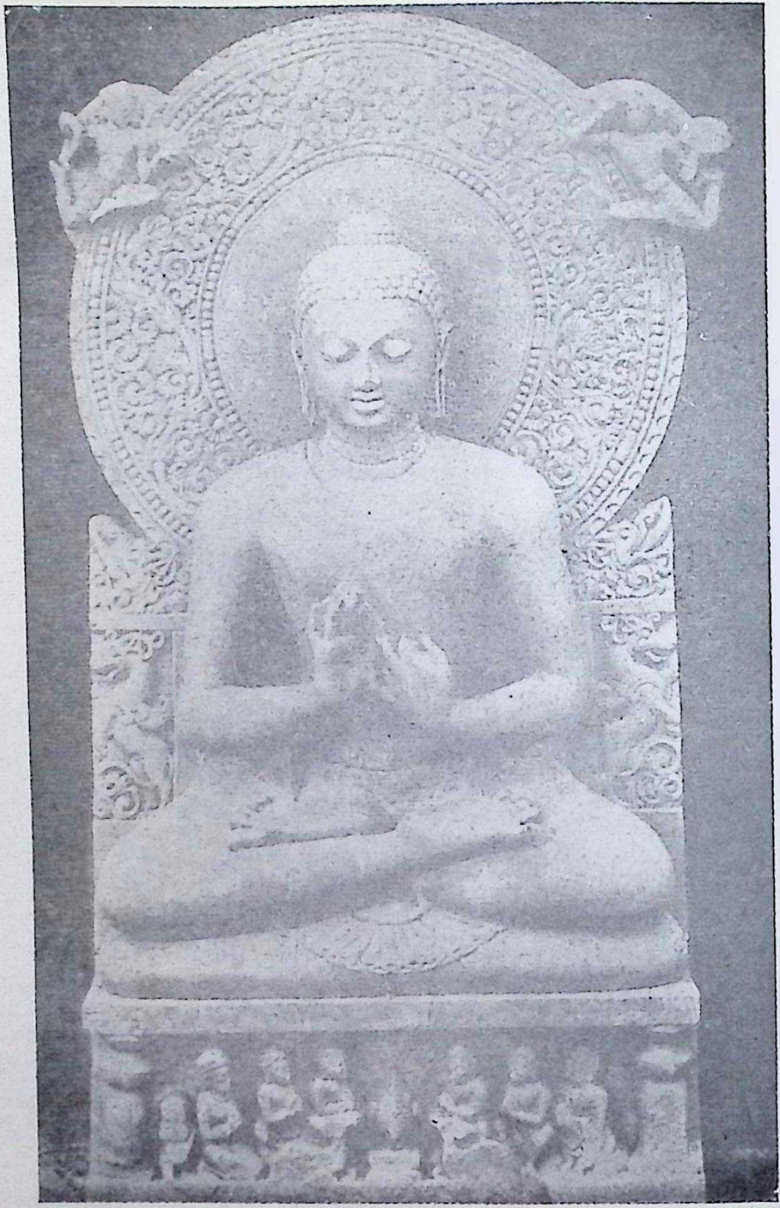

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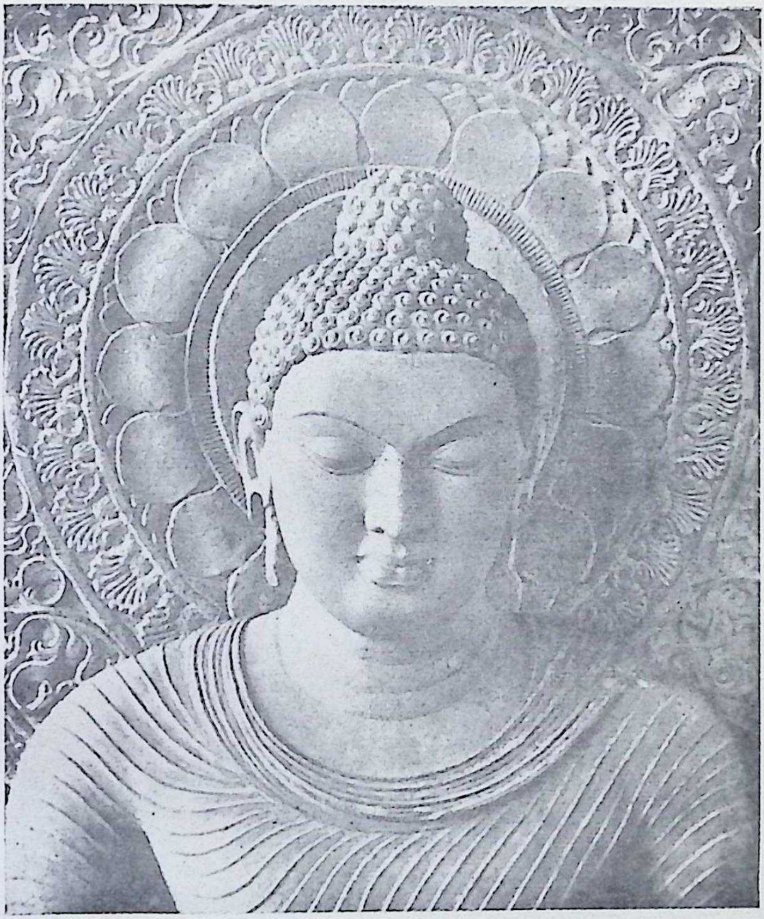

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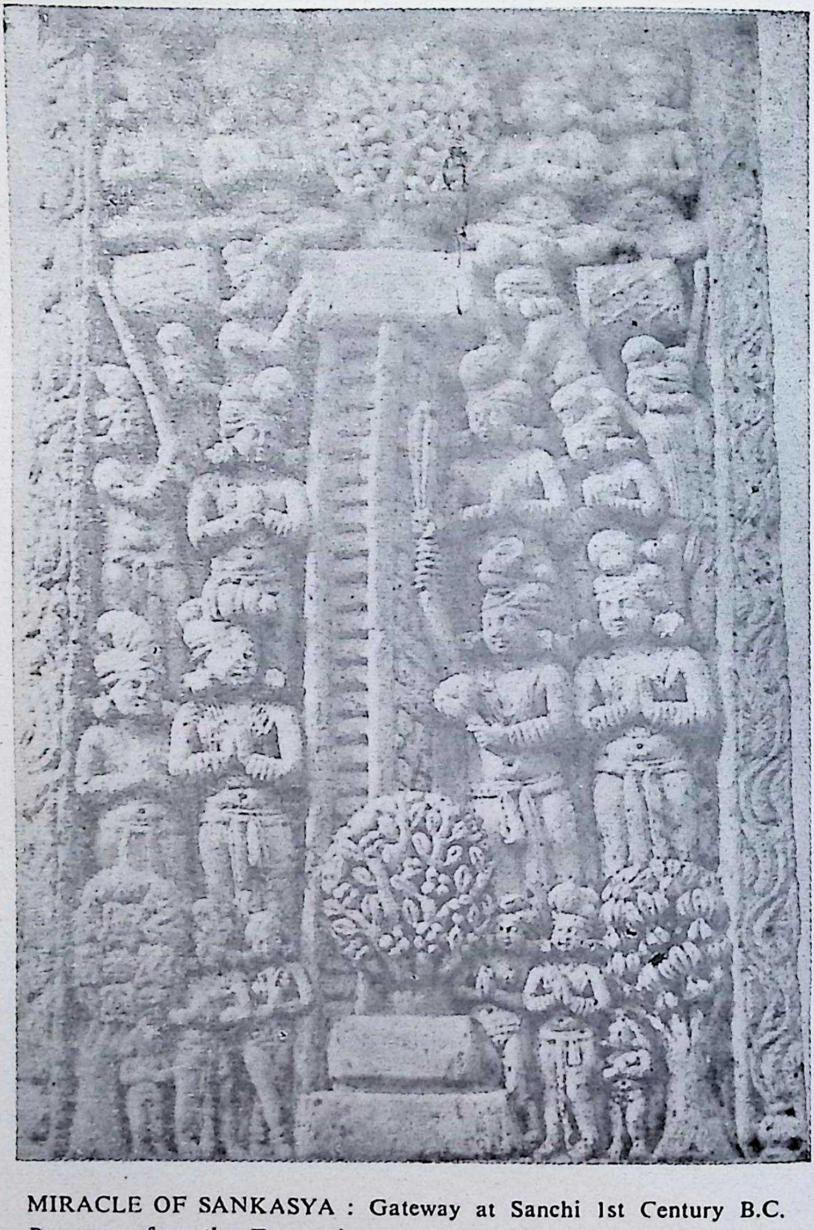

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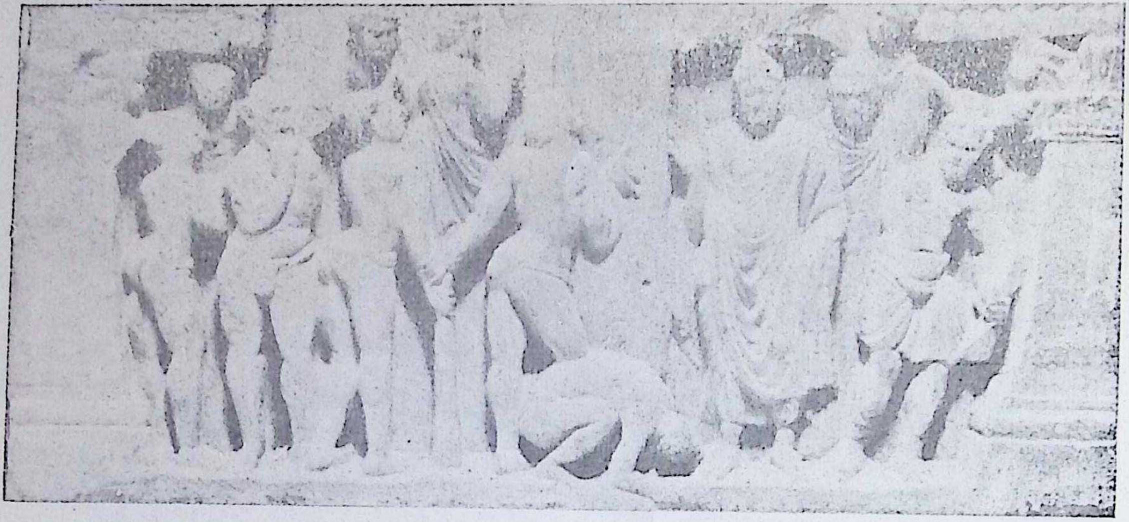

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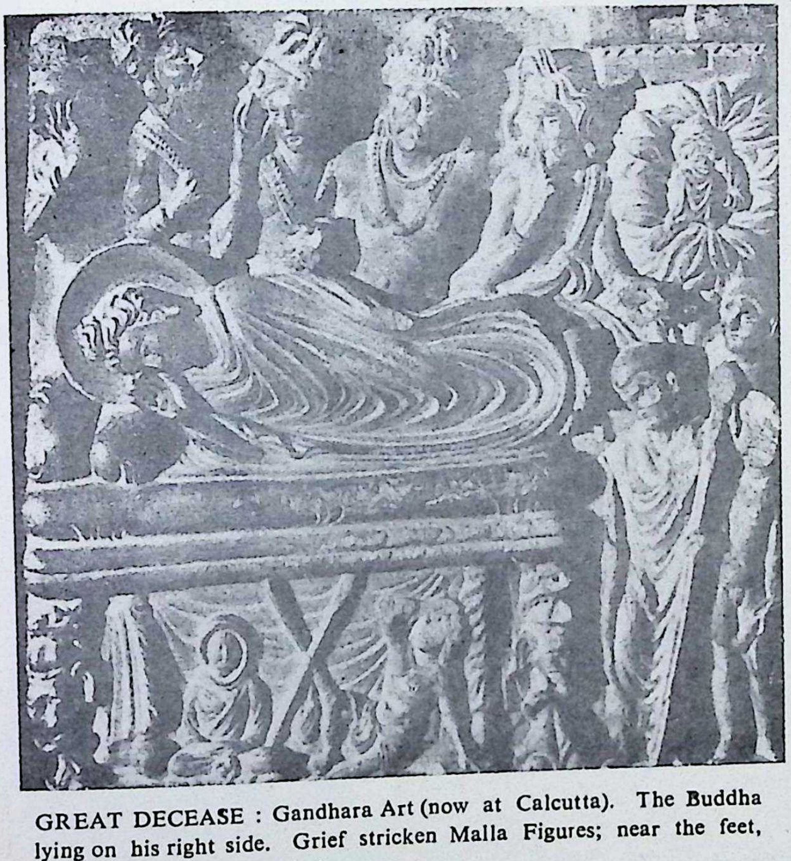

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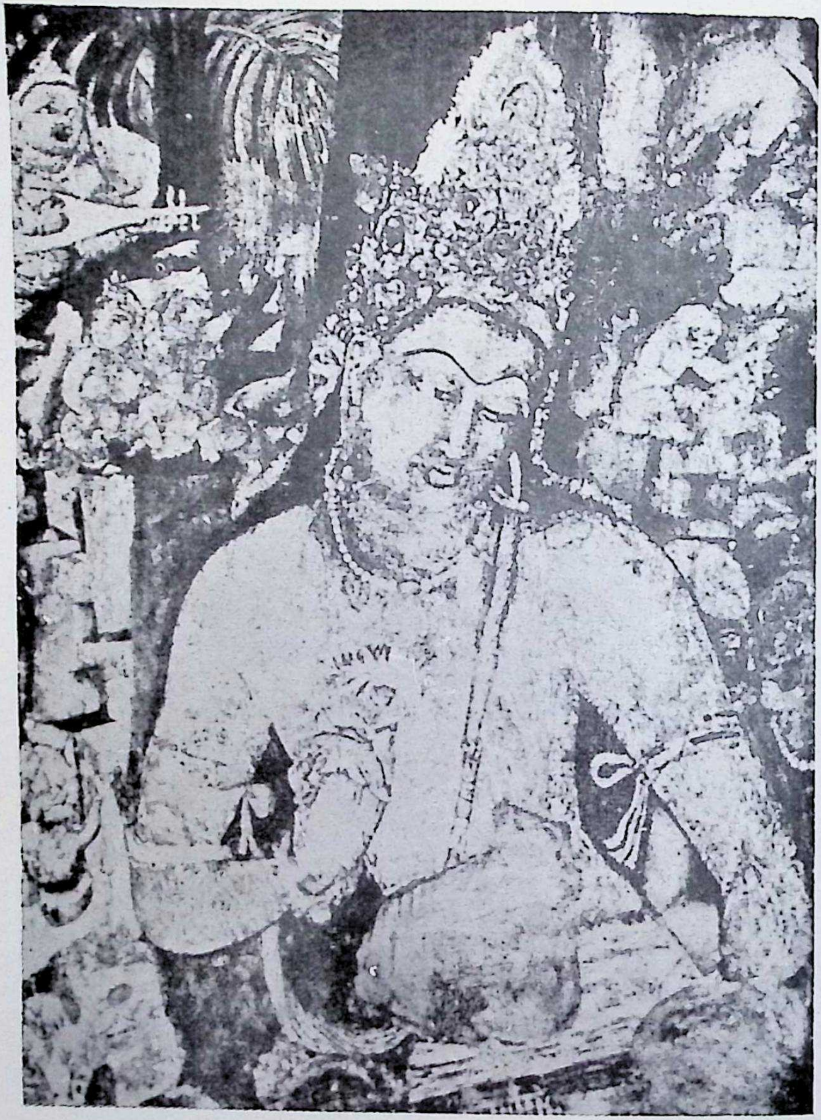

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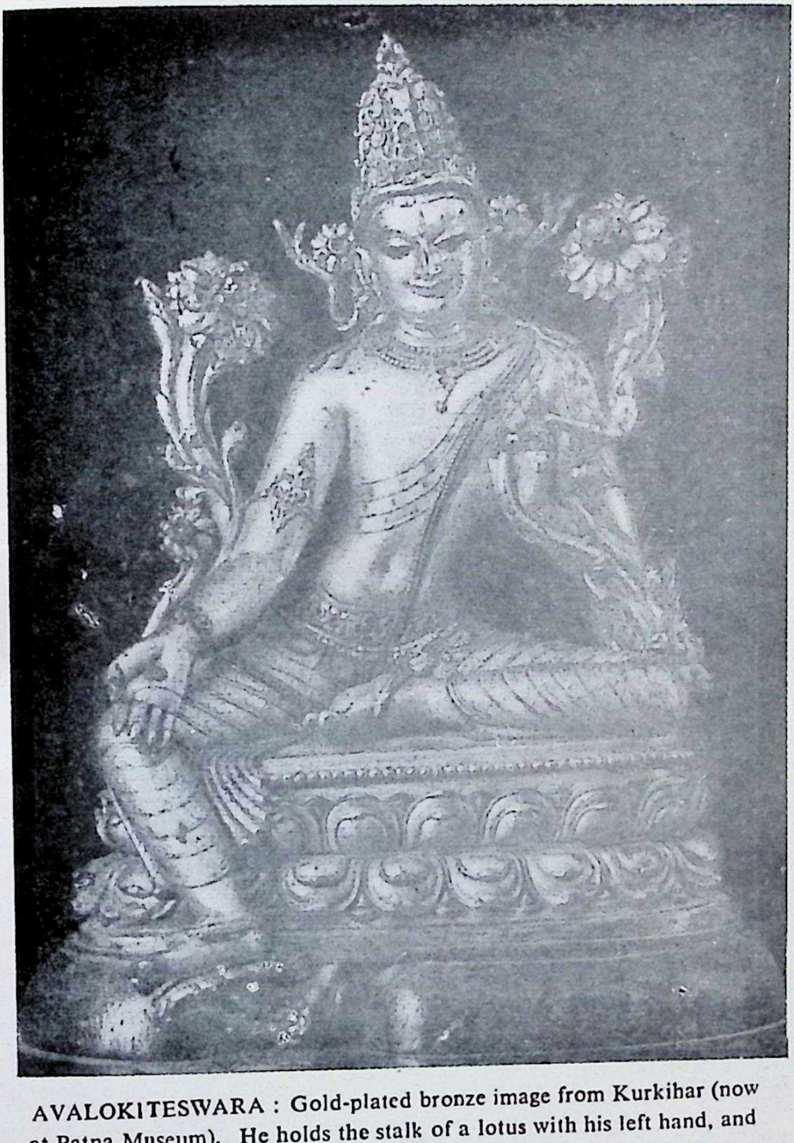

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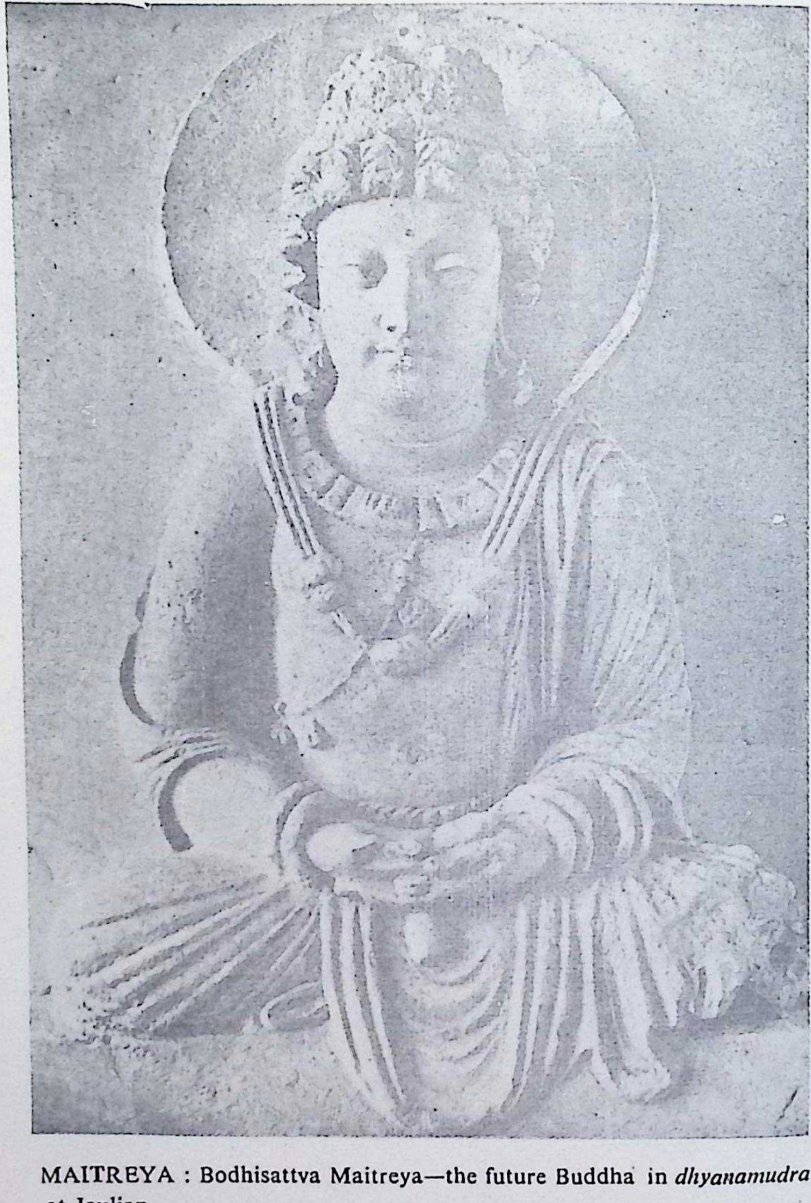

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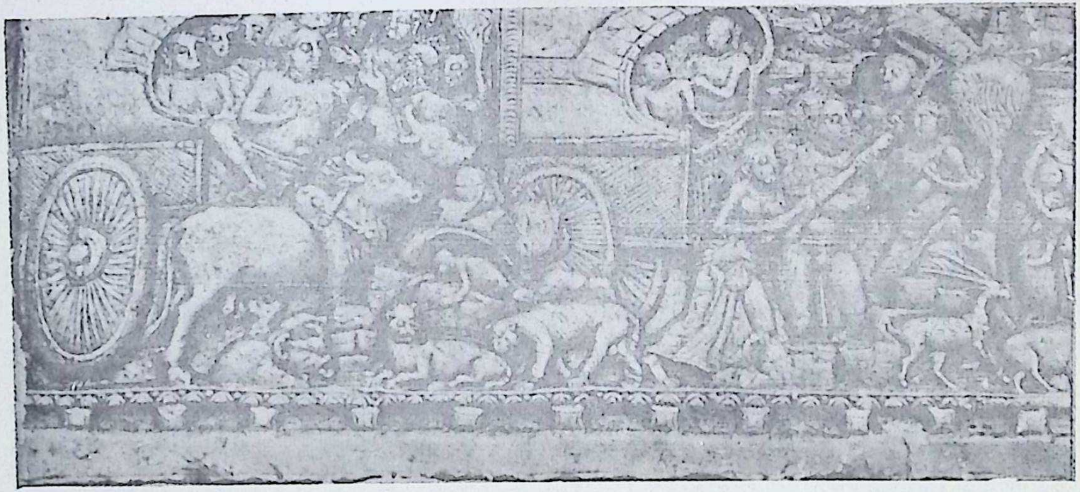

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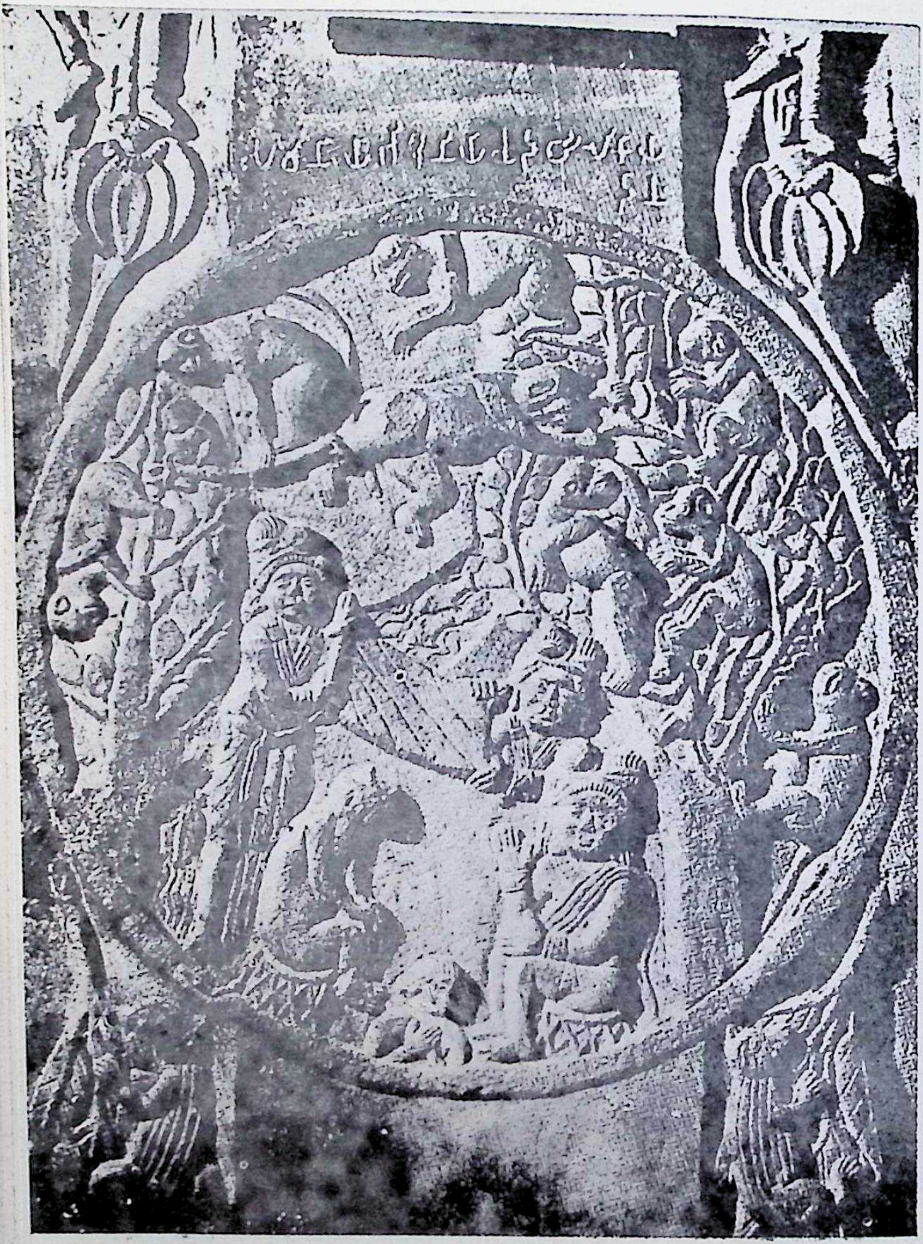

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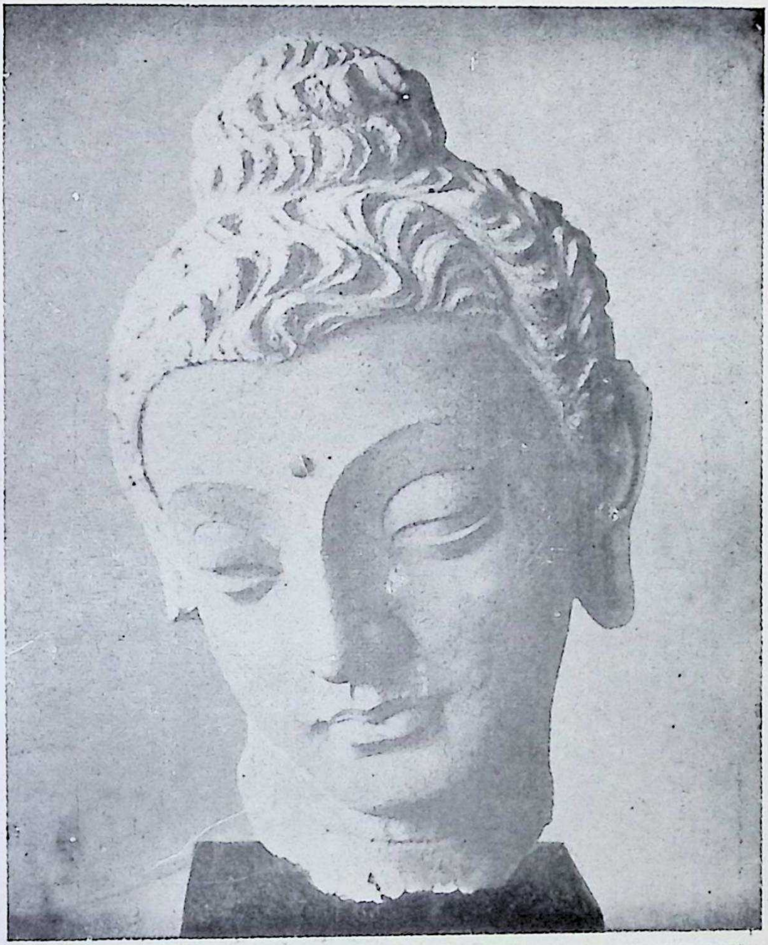
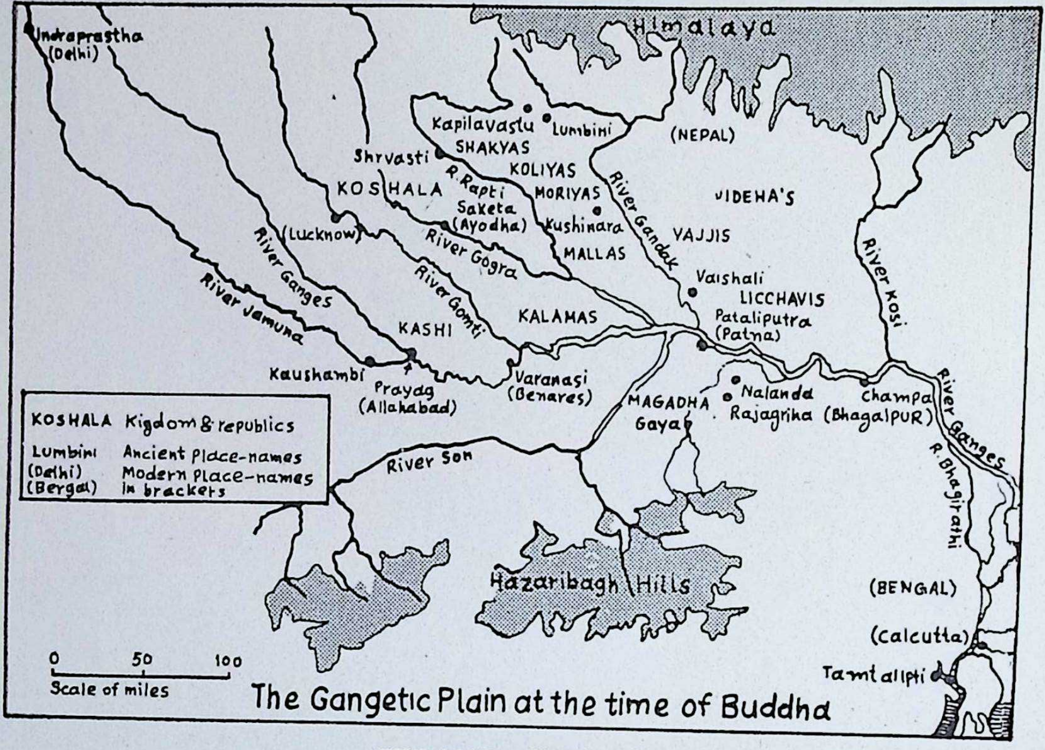


THE COMPASSIONATE BUDDHA : Gandhara, 4th Century A.D.


Himalaya
Indraprastha
(Delhi)
Kapilavastu
Lumbini
(NEPAL)
Shrvasti
SHAKYAS
KOLIYAS
KOSHALA
R. Rapti
MORIYAS
VIDEHA'S
Saketa
(Ayodha)
Kushinara
VAJJIS
(Lucknow)
River Gogra
MALLAS
River Gandak
River Kosi
River Ganges
River Gomti
Vaishali
River Jamuna
LICCHAVIS
KALAMAS
Pataliputra
(Patna)
KASHI
Kaushambi
Prayag
(Allahabad)
Varanasi
(Benares)
MAGADHA
Gaya
Nalanda
Rajagriha
Champa
(Bhagalpur)
River Ganges
R. Bhagirathi
KOSHALA Kigdom & republics
Lumbini Ancient place-names
(Delhi) (Bergal) Modern place-names in brackets
River Son
Hazaribagh Hills
(BENGAL)
(Calcutta)
Tamtallpti
0 50 100
Scale of miles
The Gangetic Plain at the time of Buddha

THE MAP : Showing Gangetic plain.

1

Gautama Buddha— A Condensed Biography

Gautama Buddha's story as well as the Jataka stories, related to his previous births as Bodhisattva, are of eternal values—earthly and divine at the same time. All these stories are organic parts of a single great saga—describing the journey of an inquisitive and compassionate soul through successive births, suffering on many counts, learning from each experience, struggling to find the truths regarding the cause and annihilation of 'suffering', and ultimately showing the path towards alleviation of misery, for the entire mankind to follow.

It is ironical that after twenty-five centuries of its glorious record in Asia, Buddhism is *apparently* extinct in its land of birth, *i.e.*, India—though really not so—and we have to recall that the great soul was born a Hindu, and lived and died as a Hindu. This book is substantially devoted to the elucidation of the Vedantic basis of the original Buddhism, a fact forgotten or ignored by the Hindu as well as the Buddhist world. It is rarely appreciated that the Buddha had evolved an integrated world-view emphasizing not only the spiritual but also the *social* aspects of human civilization. Thus, his message is Hindu in character, not in any narrow denominational sense, but in the sense that the Vedanta, the quintessence of Hindu thought, is the core in his spiritual message. Before emphasizing the 'perennial philosophy' outlined in his message, we may start with a condensed biography of one of the greatest souls the Hindu India has ever produced.

I

Gautama, the Buddha (enlightened) or Siddhartha, as he was known in his boyhood, was born in the year 563 B.C. and died at the age of 80 years in 483 B. C.[1] His father Suddhodana was the chief of the Sakya clan, ruling at Kapilavastu,[2] which was situated in a rich irrigated plain between the Nepalese foothills and the river Rohini or Rapti.

Close to Kapilavastu was the powerful Koshala empire, capital of which was Shravasti (at present Saheth-Maheth, 10 miles from Balarampur in Gonda district of U.P.). Some of the other important places of his time are :

Rajagriha (modern Rajgir in Patna district of Bihar), the capital of the powerful state of Magadha, Pataliputra (modern Patna), Vaishali (Basarh near Hajipur in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar), Uruvela or Bodh Gaya (where the Buddha attained Bodhi or supreme wisdom), six miles south of Gaya, Sarnath or Rishipatan close to Varanasi where the Buddha preached his spiritual message for the first time, Kushinagara or Kusinara (Kasia in Gorakhpur district, U.P., 35 miles east of the Gorakhpur city) where the Buddha left his mortal body in his eightieth year, Kaushambi (modern Kosham on the Jamuna, 30 miles north-west of Allahabad) where

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[1] The traditional (Ceylonese) view about the Master's death being in 544 B.C. cannot be supported by any strong evidence. Chandra Gupta's accession to throne in 321 B.C. was 162 years after the Buddha's death, vide K.N. Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita*, pp. 34-38.

[2] Probably located near modern Piprahva (27°26′N, 83°7E).

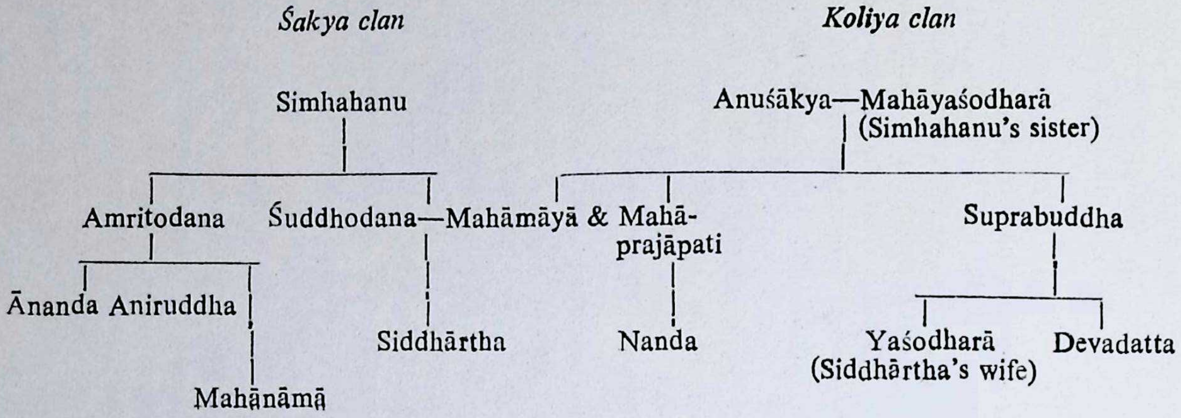
Udayan of the Vatsya Kingdom used to rule, Saket (at present Ayodhya on the Sarju river in Faizabad district, U.P.), Champa (at present Bhagalpur), Sankashya (Sankisha-Basantapur, Etah district, U.P.), Nala-gram (Nalanda or Bargaon near Rajgir) and so on. Some of these sites are located on the map given in Plate I.

The river Rohini in the Nepalese Terai, which starts from the Himalayan foothills, and later joins Mahananda and then Rapti near Gorakhpur in U.P., separates the Kingdoms of the Sakyas (at Kapilavastu) and the Koliyas (at Devahrada or Devadaha or Byaghrapur) situated on the opposite sides of the river. The two clans were connected by numerous marriages. For example, Siddhārtha's mother, step-mother as well as wife, came from the Koliya clan. Many amongst these two clans turned out to be noteworthy figures in the Buddha's life—they either propagated his spiritual message faithfully, or tried to wreck his mission. The important names are mentioned in the genealogy given on the next page.

Siddhārtha was born while his mother Mahāmāyā, on her way to her paternal place at Devadaha, was resting at the Lumbini gardens (now identified with the site of Rummindei in the Nepalese Terai). Siddhartha's mother died seven days after his birth in the year 563 B.C., and her sister Mahāprajāpati, another wife of Suddhodana, took care of the young child. Siddhārtha was brought up in Kapilavastu, educated in outdoor and martial exercises but probably not in the Brahminical lore.

He married his cousin-sister Yaśodharā and had a son, by name Rahula who later joined his Order. Siddhartha belonged, like his contemporary ascetic Vardhamana (the founder of the monastic system of the Jainas) and numerous other wandering monks, to the age of intellectual and spiritual unrest, when the pretensions of Brahminical priestcraft were no longer fully satisfying, and people were thirsting for first-hand discovery of spiritual truths. Dissatisfied with the world of pleasure, Siddhārtha left his home and submerged himself into various

Close Relatives of the Buddha


Śakya clan
Koliya clan
Simhahanu
Anuśākya—Mahāyaśodharā
(Simhahanu's sister)
Amritodana
Śuddhodana—Mahāmāyā & Mahā-prajāpati
Suprabuddha
Ānanda
Aniruddha
Mahānāmā
Siddhārtha
Nanda
Yaśodharā
(Siddhārtha's wife)
Devadatta

spiritual practices till he attained *Nirvana* or eternal wisdom in Bodh Gaya at the age of 35, *i.e.*, 528 B.C.

For the next 14 years, up to 514 B.C., he is known to have spread his message of the Four Aryan Truths and the Eightfold Path to conquer the worldly miseries. Even though the next 23 years of his life (namely, the period between 514 B.C. and 491 B.C.) are not well-chronicled, it is well-known that he continued to spread his message around Rajagriha, Shravasti, Vaishali, Kaushambi, Sarnath, etc., and the rank of Buddhist monks, nuns and kings swelled on account of his inspiring teaching.

While the challenges from the Brahminical priestcraft and various sects like Tirthika were met much earlier, the revolt from within the Buddhistic order engineered by his own cousin brother (as well as brother-in-law) Davadatta occurred around 491 B.C., when the Buddha was 72 years old. During the next eight years, the evil influences in the Order were eliminated and good sense prevailed. However, most of the Buddha's close associates died one by one, and ultimately he also expired near Kushinagar at the age of 80 (*i.e.*, 483 B.C.).

II

A Living Biography of the Buddha

The above historical information, widely acknowledged by the historians, is a mere skeleton of facts, and does not show the Buddha as a living figure, all flesh and blood, who did not 'die' 2500 years back but has continued to inspire many followers and admirers all over the world. For a 'living' biography of a saint, however, one has to mention not only facts but also many stories which may be considered by some as legends or myths, and therefore incredible. Nevertheless, how can we omit the stories told by the Buddha himself? These previous-birth or Jātaka stories are indissolubly linked with the philosophy and message that he wanted to preach. The supernatural aspects in the biographies of saintly personalities like Gautama Buddha can be sparingly cited, but not eliminated altogether. We propose to retain this flavour of divinity in our narrative.

The story of the Buddha starts from the premise that in the human history, countless Buddhas are destined to appear, and help in alleviation of the sufferings of the mankind. They are not merely enlightened souls. Having attained supreme spiritual enlightenment through sufferings, sacrifices and struggles in successive births, a Buddha dedicates his last life in enlightening others and exhorting the whole mankind to follow his noble example. His message lasts for several centuries and then revived by successive 'Buddhas'. Gautama Buddha appeared on the scene of human history after many such Buddhas. Each Buddha-designate moves through successive births as Bodhisattva before attaining the final Enlightenment.

Long ago, there was a Brahmin called Sumedha who renounced the world to obtain spiritual wisdom. He was moved by the character and piety of a Buddha of his time, named Dipankara. It happened one day that Dipankara Buddha was walking on a path, and Sumedha threw himself on the mud so that the Buddha might move upon his body without soiling his feet. The Buddha was moved, and blessed that Sumedha shall attain *Nirvāṇa* or supreme bliss in his last birth, and be known as Gautama Buddha.

Sumedha continued the practices of 'Ten Perfections', indispensable for the attainment of Buddhahood. In the last of his births as Bodhisattva, he was born as Prince Vishwantara (*Vessantara* in Pali) possessing sublime qualities of universal piety for all creatures and an indomitable spirit of charity and sacrifice for the cause of others. Jātaka stories include this as well as 546 other Bodhisattva stories of the previous births. In some births, Bodhisattva was born as animals or trees or human beings in diverse strata of society—such as a thief or a merchant or a priest or a king and so on. In all these births, the zeal for the discovery of truth, the strive for greatness and the willingness to learn from experiences and mistakes were manifest in the Bodhisattva. In the penultimate birth as Prince Vishwantara, Bodhisattva attained near perfection in terms of human qualities. Now, he was destined to attain in his last birth as Gautama, the super-human or divine quality as a spiritual giant and eternal teacher.

The story of Gautama's birth goes as follows. At the time of a mid-summer festival in Kapilavastu, Mahāmāyā, Suddhodana's wife, lay on a couch and dreamed a dream. She was carried away by four angels to the Himalayas, bathed in a lake and then allowed to rest on a heavenly couch in a golden mansion, when the Bodhisattva entered her womb as a beautiful white elephant bearing in his trunk a white lotus flower. When Mahāmāyā related her dream, some Brahmins interpreted that she had conceived a man-child who could become a Universal Monarch or a Buddha. After ten lunar months, Mahāmāyā was on her way to her paternal home at Devadaha, when she felt tired and entered into the Lumbini garden, full of *śāl* and other trees with fruits and flowers for rest. Gautama was born at this time amidst many auspicious signs. The Buddhists believe that the new-born child stood upright, took seven strides, and cried : 'I am supreme in the world. This is my last birth'.

There was great rejoicing in the king's palace and in the country. A hermit named Kala Devala (or Asita Devala) saw Gautama, the new-born child, and predicted, that he shall be a Buddha in his present birth; however, Kala Devala would not live to witness the emergence of the great teacher. He advised his nephew Nalaka, at that time a householder, to follow Gautama when he becomes a Buddha. Both the hermit and the father saluted the new-born child. On the fifth day after his birth, the child was named Siddhārtha. He was also called Gautama, after the name of the clan in which he was born.

Of the eight astrologers invited to predict the future of this child, seven foresaw that the child could become a great king or a great ascetic, and the eighth, by the name Kaundinna, who later became one of the first five disciples of Gautama, predicted that the child shall become a Buddha. It was further predicted that Gautama shall renounce the world witnessing four signs : a man worn out by age, a sick man, a dead body, and a hermit. The king resolved that such sights should never be seen by his son. Two days later, Mahāmāyā died leaving her sister Mahāprajapati, Suddhodana's other wife, to look after the new-born child.

On the occasion of the ploughing festival, another miracle happened. Siddhārtha took his seat beneath a Jambu-tree, and meditated for the first time in his life. Though time passed, shadow of the tree did not move as if to protect the child from the scorching rays of the sun. King Suddhodana beheld that miracle and bowed to the divine child for the second time.

Suddhodana built for his son three palaces, suitable for different seasons and equipped with all the elements of luxury and entertainment, so that Siddhārtha may never see the 'four signs' of stark reality in life. However, he was trained in literature, arts and martial exercises.

Siddhārtha Marries Yaśodharā

At the age of sixteen (*i.e.*, 547 B.C.), negotiations started for Gautama's marriage. At last, the choice fell upon his cousin Yaśodharā, the daughter of Suprabuddha. Suprabuddha however commented that Siddhārtha had lived amidst luxury and was probably incompetent in martial exercises, and therefore not fit to marry Yaśodharā. Suddhodana felt hurt at this insinuation, but Siddhārtha advised that a contest may be arranged for martial exercises. In due course, Gautama defeated all the other young men in wrestling, archery, etc., and proved himself fit to marry Yaśodharā. Amongst the defeated Sakyas were two cousins of Siddhārtha—one Ānanda, who later became his favourite disciple, and the other Devadatta who joined his Order but eventually ruined himself through envy and hatred against the Buddha.

The Four Signs

The marriage took place and Siddhārtha was immersed in more pleasure and merry-making. But the thirty-three Gods headed by Śakra (Indra) decided to remind Siddhārtha about his destiny. His father remembered that 'four signs' would make his son renounce the world, and therefore took appropriate precautions. However, one day while Gautama was moving through the city towards one of the pleasure-gardens, he came across an aged man who was really a God in disguise. Siddhārtha was told by his charioteer Chhandaka, on enquiry, that everyone must become old and this body must age and perish. On successive trips, he saw a sick man and a dead man. At last, he saw a *Bhikkhu*, a mendicant friar, carrying a beggar's bowl and with serene contented face. Chhandaka explained that this man had renounced the world and all earthly passions in order to discover the supreme truth. Bodhisattva or Siddhārtha was now convinced that bodily pleasures had to be renounced, and the ascetic's life was the only covetable life.

Suddhodana was now extremely worried, and argued with Siddhārtha that he should become a king to enjoy his life. Siddhārtha counter-argued that the King's life would not help him in overcoming sickness, ageing and death, nor in reaching the supreme goal in life. Suddhodana put more guards in the city gates and more women around Siddhārtha, so that he might not escape. Siddhārtha was however determined.*

On the morning of the day he set for renouncing the world, a son was born to Yaśodharā. Siddhārtha did not rejoice; he named the child *Rahula*—a 'hindrance' for him. The same day, a noble virgin, Kisa Gotami, later his convert, sang a song praising the physical beauty of the prince. But that made him even more introspective and consider that *Nirvāna* or extinction of desire is the only beautiful thing. During that night, the women in his palace fell asleep, and Gautama smiled at the vain caprices of the women trying to confine him within a life of sensual pleasures. With Chhandaka, the charioteer, and his favourite horse Kanthaka, he started on his great renunciation without bidding farewell to his wife and the new-born child.

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*Suttanipāta (verse 936) gives another version as to why the Buddha renounced the world : 'seeing the people in conflict with one another, fear overcame me'.

As soon as he started on his chariot, *Māra*, the Fiend, appeared and tempted Bodhisattva that if he did not renounce the world, he shall be a king of the four continents in seven days. But Gautama was not to succumb to such temptations. It was the full moon day of Āṣāḍha when Gautama left the city. He was 29 years old at that time (534 B.C.). His great departure was hailed by Gods and angels.

Gautama crossed the river Anoma (Aumi in Distt. Gorakhpur ?), took Chhandaka's sharp sword, severed with it his long hair-locks and jewelled crest, and cast them into the river water. He asked Chhandaka to go back to Kapilavastu and tell his relatives that he may return again, only after the attainment of *Nirvāna*. The horse Kanthaka realised that it may not see Gautama again and died out of grief. Chhandaka, the charioteer, wept and turned back, while Gautama put on a hermit's dress for his onward journey.

III

Gautama stayed in the mango groves of Anupiya in the Malla Kingdom and then proceeded to Rajagriha where the king Bimbisara was ruling at that time. All passers-by and villagers were impressed by the stately yet serene appearance of this mendicant, and so was the king who requested Gautama to help him in royal administration. Gautama said that he was no more interested in the evanescent affairs of the world. However, he agreed to come back to Rajagriha after attaining *Nirvāna*.

At that time, Ārāda Kālāma and Rudraka Rāmaputra were staying near Vaiśāli and Rājagriha respectively. They were widely renowned as teachers in Brahminic or Vedantic scriptures. Gautama tried to learn from them, but eventually failed to accept their doctrines. Whereas the Brahmins considered *Ātman* or 'Soul' to be different from body, and to them salvation meant self-realisation and detachment of this 'Ātman' (as the reed freed from *muñja* grass or as the bird out of its cage), Gautama identified 'Ātman' with ego which does not have an eternal existence. According to him, 'there is no evidence of the existence of an immutable ego-being, of a self which remains the same and migrates from body to body. There is rebirth but no transmigration. The doctrine of *Karma* (consequences out of past deeds) is undeniable, but the theory of ego has no foundation.' Probably, Gautama was not exposed to the full glory of Vedantic thoughts. His prime concern being the destruction of the ego (*Ātman* in his terminology)—the source of all attachments and miseries, he did not realise that the Vedantic thought has a broader notion about 'Ātman', and identifies the ego-consciousness as a mere manifestation of the eternal universal consciousness. Gautama also visited the priests officiating in the temples and deprecated the practice of animal slaughter for the sake of religion. He urged : 'Can the slaughter of an innocent victim blot out the evil deeds of mankind ?'

'To abandon covetousness and lust, to become free from evil passions, nd to give up all hatred and ill-will, that is the right sacrifice and the true worship'.

Then, he left Rajagriha and entered the forests of Uruvela near Gaya. There, he met five mendicants (Kaundinna, Bāshpa, Bhadrika, Mahānāmā and Aśvajit). Kaundinna was the fortune-teller who had predicted a great spiritual life for Gautama. These five monks were indulging in austere and hard spiritual practices, and Gautama joined them in even more arduous austerities. But such austerities for six long years did not give him any enlightenment. Extremely frail in body due to the austere practices, he almost met death when he went to take bath in the river Nairanjana. A lady, Sujātā by name, saved him by offering rice-milk. Gautama realised that enlightenment does not come through mere self-mortification, and abandoned this path. However, his five colleagues were dismayed at the change in his attitude, and left him for Rishipatana near Varanasi.

Gautama now took care to eat nourishing food which was provided by Sujātā, the daughter of a village headman. Thoroughly refreshed by the sweet dish of rice-milk, he sat below an *Aśvattha* tree (*Ficus religiosa*) (later known as the Bodhi-tree) and strove for the supreme enlightenment on the full-moon day of the month of May (*Vaiśakhī Pūrnimā*). He resolved : "Let my skin, my nerves and my bones waste away, and my life-blood dry, but I will not leave this seat until I have attained Supreme Enlightenment."

Māra, the Fiend, appeared, and started alternately threatening, and tempting Gautama about mundane things of life. As a messenger from Kapliavastu, he told Gautama that Devadatta had imprisoned his father and taken his wife captive. But Gautama was not to be taken in by such caprices. Then came whirlwind and thundershower. Gautama was unmoved. Now Māra challenged Gautama that he had not accumulated enough virtue in his previous birth. Gautama referred to his supernatural generosity in his previous birth as Vishwantara. At last, Māra brought his tempting daughters—Trishnā, Rati and Arati, but even their seductive dances could not move Gautama.

The victory was achieved while the sun was yet above the horizon. As the calmness of the nature descended after the sunset, Gautama gained recollection of his previous births (*Puruanivāsa Jñāna*), omniscient vision (*Divyachakshu*) and lastly the perfect understanding of the chain of causation which is the origin of Evil (*pratitya-samutpāda*). Thus, at the age of 35 years (528 B.C.), he attained the Perfect Enlightenment; Gautama became the Buddha. The song of triumph emanated from his lips :

'Through many births I sought in vain
The Builder of this House of Pain

Now, Builder, thee I plainly see !
This is the last abode for me.
Broken are all thy beams
You can't build me by any more means
Ending of desire attained at last
My mind into Nirvāna has passed."

(Dhammapada, 153-154)

For the next seven weeks or forty-nine days, the Buddha was lost in spiritual contemplation, and discovered the principles of causality, existence and *Nirvāṇa*. 'In the beginning, there was existence blind* and without knowledge and in this sea of ignorance there were stirrings formative and organizing. From this arose awareness or feelings. The thirst of being created a cleaving to things. This produced selfhood or ego, the root of all miseries which can be annihilated by *Nirvāṇa* or ego-less wisdom'.

At the end of seven weeks' contemplation, the Buddha received two Brahmin merchants, Tapussa and Bhallika, who were travelling with a caravan from Orissa to the middle country. They offered the Buddha rice and honey cakes, and moved by his piety and moral splendour, became the first disciples of the Buddhist Order.

While the Buddha was considering what he should do with this new spiritual knowledge, he heard the God Brahmā exclaiming, 'there are some beings that are almost free from the dust of worldliness. If they hear not the doctrine preached, they will be lost. But if they hear it, they will believe and be saved'. So the Buddha decided to spread his message far and wide.

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*It is doubtful whether the Buddha said that the original existence was 'blind' instead of being Univerval thought, as beautifully brought out in Nāsadiya Hymn in Ṛgveda (10.129). The rest of the statement attributed to the Buddha is remarkably similar to the Ṛgveda Hymn.

IV

His teachers Alara Kalama and Rudraka Ramaputra had expired; therefore, the Buddha decided to meet his five Brahmin colleagues (who had deserted him at Uruvela), and proceeded towards Rishipatana or deer park near Varanasi. On his way, he met Upaka, a Jaina mendicant (follower of Jinas like Vardhamâna), who was impressed by the Buddha's spirituality but did not embrace his religion.

In the deer park, the five Brahmins were not at first happy with the Buddha, since he had renounced the practices of severe austerity. However, the Buddha convinced them about the merit of 'middle path' which seeks to avoid indulgence in worldly pleasures as well as unnecessary severe austerities and inflicting bodily pains for attaining salvation. He said, "Sacrifice to the Gods, self-mortification by heat or cold and many such penances performed for the sake of immortality do not cleanse the man who is not free from delusions. Pleasure-seeking is degrading and vulgar, but to satisfy the necessities of life is not evil. To keep the body in good health is a duty, for otherwise, we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom."

The Buddha propounded the four noble Aryan truths concerning the existence of sorrow, the cause of suffering, the cessation of sorrow and the eight-fold path that leads to the cessation of sorrow. The noble eight-fold path consists of right views (illumination of the path), right aspirations (guide), right speech (dwelling place on the road), right behaviour (straight composure), right livelihood (refreshments), right efforts (steps), right thoughts (breath) and right contemplation (peace on the journey).

The Buddha opened the gate of *Nirvāṇa* or immortality before the five Brahmin mendicants, and set the wheel of the most excellent religious law (*Dharma Chakra*) rolling : 'The spokes of the wheel are the rules of pure conduct, justice is the uniformity of their length, wisdom is the tire, modesty and thoughtfulness are the hub in which the immovable axle of truth is fixed.'

This sermon profoundly influenced the five Brahmins, who embraced the new religion and continued their *sadhanā* towards *Nirvāṇa* through annihilation of ego and desires—root of all sufferings. To them, as to the Buddha, 'soul' meant ego and was of transient nature, and could not have any permanent existence.

At that time, Yasa, son of a merchant at Varanasi, was attracted by the Buddha's sermons at the deer park and embraced the Order. The aggrieved parents and the young wife were consoled by the Buddha, and became the first lay disciples of the Order. Yasa also brought in four young friends with spiritual yearning into the Order; later, fifty others joined, and thus the Buddha had sixty disciples. He exhorted them to preach the new religion of truth 'in all quarters of the world, for the benefit of the many, for the welfare of mankind, out of compassion for the world'. He himself set out for Uruvela. Since that time, it became an established custom for the *bhikkhus* (mendicants) to travel in good weather, and come back to join their Master during the rainy season. Chronology of many events in the Buddha's life and his sermons is marked in terms of successive rainy seasons (first, sixth, etc.) after his enlightenment at Uruvela. Some such chronological data are given below.

Gautama Buddha—Some Chronological Data

B.C.	
563	Birth—Vaiśākhī Pūrṇimā—full-moon in May.
547	Marriage.
543	Accession of Bimbisara, the king of Magadha.
534	Renounced the world—Āṣārh Pūrṇimā.
528	Enlightenment at Uruvela, Gaya, Vaiśākhī Pūrṇimā 1st Rainy Season (hereafter R.S.) at Varanasi. 60 disciples sent towards different directions. Converted Kashyapa (Kassapa), Sariputra (Sariputta), etc.

527	2nd R.S. at Varanasi. Then to Rajagriha, Kapilavastu. Back to Rajagriha. Met Anāthapindada and visited Shravasti for the first time.
526-524	3rd-5th R.S. at Rajagriha. To Vaishali during epidemic. Sakya-Koliya strife averted. Death of Suddhodana. Mahāprajapati renounces the world.
523	6th R S. at Shravasti. Defeat of Tirthikas.
522	7th R.S. at Shravasti.
521	8th R.S. at Crocodile Hill, Bharga country, between Yamunā and Śone.
520	9th R.S. at Kaushambi; internal feud at Ghositaram.
519	10th R.S. at Verañjā (Vairambha near Mathurā). Trip to Sankashya, Kanyakubja, Prayag, Varanasi and then Vaishali.
515	14th R.S. at Jetavana. Suprabuddha punished.
512-510	17th-19th R.S. at Venuvana, Rajagriha.
509	20th R.S. at Jethavana, Shravasti. Ānanda becomes personal attendant. Conversion of Angulimāla. Conspiracy of Tirthikas. To Anga (northern Bengal and Assam) with Aniruddha.
508-492	Not much information available.
491	Murderous conspiracies by Devadatta and Ajātaśatru.
484	Death of Prasenjit. Destruction of Kapilavastu.
484	Trip to Nālandā, Pātaliputra. Last R.S. at Vaishali. Death of Sariputra and Maudgallayana.
483 B.C.	Vaiśākhī Pūrṇimā—Mahāparinirvāṇa at Kushinārā. 80 years age. First Buddhist Council at Rajagriha.

At Uruvela, the Buddha met the *Jatilas*, also known as *Agnihotris* or fire-worshippers. They were Brahmin hermits with matted hair, worshipping the fire and keeping a fire-dragon or serpent. Of the three Kassapa Brothers, Uruvela Kassapa (later known as Mahakassapa), Nadi Kassapa and Gaya Kassapa, the first one was well-known in the country as an authority on religion. The Buddha stayed one night in the fire-worshipping room and tamed a serpent. Uruvela Kassapa did not at first accept that the Buddha was as holy as he claimed to be. As a matter of fact, he was envious that his popularity may wane on account of the Buddha's presence at Uruvela. The Lord read his mind and said, "You do not accept the truth because envy dwells in thy heart. Is envy holiness? Envy is the last remnant of self that has remained in thy mind." At last Kassapa gave up his animosity and envy disappeared from his mind. About 1000 Jatilas led by the three Kassapas bowed to the Buddha, who took them to the nearby mountain Gayasirsha and delivered his third Sermon (Adiptaparyāya) on Fire: "Everything, O Jatilas, is burning and on fire—the eyes, the senses and the thoughts. They are burning with the fire of lust, ignorance, hatred and glamour. As long as the fire finds inflammable things upon which it can feed, so long will it burn, and there will be birth and death, decay, grief, lamentation, suffering, despair and sorrow. Understand the four noble truths, walk in the eight-fold path of holiness, be delivered from selfishness and attain the blessed state of *Nirvāṇa*."

Followed by nearly one thousand disciples, the Buddha proceeded to Rajagriha to keep his promise, earlier made to the Magadha King Bimbisāra, that he would revisit him after enlightenment. Bimbisāra was amazed to see Kassapa in the Buddha's company and enquired who had made the other one his disciple; Kassapa replied, abandoning all his vanity, that he had given up penances, ritual sacrifices and fire-worshipping, to follow the Buddha's golden path of *Nirvāṇa* : 'The Blessed Lord is my Master, and I am the disciple.' Bimbisāra and many people of his kingdom adopted Buddhism. At first, the Buddha and his followers were living in a palm-grove far away from Rajagriha. Bimbisara donated 'Venuvana' (bamboo grove), which was not too far from Rajagriha, for a Buddhist monastery, so that he could come regularly and neet his Master, the Buddha. It is here that the Buddha gave his message for annihilation of selfishness and ego, through love and compassion.

The Buddha said here, "Some say that the self endures after death, some say it perishes. Both are wrong. If they say the self is perishable, the fruit they strive for, will perish too, and at the same time there will be no hereafter. Good and evil would be indifferent. This salvation from selfishness is without merit." "On the other hand, there is no *permanent* self," said the Buddha. "There is no actor behind our actions, no Lord behind our deeds. As the sun's power through a burning glass causes fire to appear, so through the cognizance born of sense and object, the mind originates and with it, the ego, the thought of self, whom some Brahmin teachers call the Lord. Ye that are slaves of the self receive the good tidings that your cruel master exists not. Self is an error; open your eyes and awaken." According to the Buddha, parting with lust, selfishness and all concepts of self or ego, is the only way to *Nirvāṇa*, and this can be done best through universal love. The Buddha said, "As the light of the moon is sixteen times stronger than the light of all the stars, so love or compassion to others is sixteen times more efficacious in liberating the heart than all other religious accomplishments taken together".

At that time, there were two young Brahmins, Sariputra and Maudgallayana (Moggalana in Pali), living in Rajagriha. They were not satisfied with their teacher Sanjayi Bairathputra's religious doctrine, and met Aśvajit, one of the Buddha's earliest disciples. Aśvajit told them what he had learnt of the Buddha's spiritual message. Sariputra and Maudgallayana were encouraged to meet the Buddha, and when they did, they were immediately hailed by the Master as the *Agraśāvakas* or the forerunners amongst his disciples. It is said that they attained *Nirvāṇa* in a very short time through intense spiritual efforts.

The Buddha spent the next rainy season at Varanasi (527 B.C.), and then three months at Uruvela and two months at Rajagriha. Gautama Buddha's father Suddhodana had been sending messengers requesting his son to visit his birth-place.

But all messengers joined the Buddha's Order and failed to return to Kapilavastu. Ultimately, the King's minister Kala Udayi came and extended invitation to the Buddha, but not before becoming the Buddha's disciple. It was on *Falguna Purnima* (full-moon) that the Buddha departed from Rajagriha for Kapilavastu.

Prince Gautama went back to Kapilavastu as the 'Buddha' completing a full circle of his life. At first, his friends and relatives showed more affection than respect. But the Buddha performed a miracle, raising his seat in the sky so that everybody including his father bowed down before the teacher. The next day the Master went round the city with his begging bowl which shocked his father, the King. But the Master was firm and said that he was following the tradition of the Buddhas and did not care about his royal lineage. In the open street he recited :

"Rise from dreams and loiter not
Open to truth thy mind
Practice righteousness and thou
Eternal bliss shalt find."

King Suddhodana at last accepted the monks on their own terms. All ladies except Yaśodharā visited the Buddha. Accompanied by his two chief disciples, the Buddha went to meet Yaṣodharā who prostrated before her husband and master. King Suddhodana narrated how Yaśodharā had led a life of austerity when she heard about the austerities practised by her monk-husband, and how she refused to re-marry or embrace a life of pleasure. The Buddha smiled and recounted how Yaśodharā had followed her husband Bodhisattva in her previous lives with unwavering loyalty and dedication. On the second day, Suddhodana and Mahāprajāpati's son, Nanda, was to be crowned as the King-designate and also to be married with Janapada Kalyani, a princess. But fate willed otherwise, and the Buddha persuaded him to join his Order as a monk. Yaśodharā asked her seven-year-old son, Rahula, to go to his father and ask for paternal inheritance. Addressing Rahula with earnestness, the Buddha said, "Gold and silver and jewels are not in my possession. But if thou art willing to receive spiritual treasures, and art strong enough to carry them and to keep them I shall give thee the four truths which will teach thee the eightfold path of righteousness." Rahula wanted to join the Brotherhood and the Buddha accepted him as a novice. King Suddhodana was very much depressed to have lost Nanda and now Rahula from his family and kingdom. The Buddha promised that then onwards he would not ordain any minor without the consent of his parents or guardians.

Departing from Kapilavastu, the Buddha halted for a short time at the mango grove of Anupiya. Here his cousins (or Sakya princes), Ānanda, who later became the Buddha's constant personal attendant, Aniruddha, Devadatta (later his enemy) as well as Upāli, the royal barber, who later became famous as Vinayadhar and compiled Vinayapitaka, joined the Buddhistic Order.

On return from Kapilavastu, the Buddha stayed at Shitavana near Rajagriha where he met the famous donor merchant Anāthapindada (the patron of the orphans and monks) earlier known as Sudatta. This merchant belonged to Shravasti and was staying at that time with a friend at Rajagriha. He was deeply moved by the Buddha's message. The Buddha told him that it was not necessary for all householders to renounce the world. Even charitable works had great merit. A charitable man that he himself was, Anāthapindada quickly perceived the Buddha's message : "The charitable man has found the path of salvation. Loving and compassionate, he gives with reverence and banishes all hatred, envy and anger. We reach the immortal path only by continuous acts of kindliness, and we perfect our souls by compassion and charity." Anāthapindada invited the Buddha to visit Shravasti, the capital of Kośala, overflowing with riches and abundance. The Buddha agreed, and Anāthapindada left post-haste with Sariputra for making suitable arrangements for the Buddha and the huge number of his monk followers.

Extremely rich that he was, Anāthapindada purchased a big plot of land with trees near Shravasti from its owner Jetakumar at huge cost. With Sariputra's direct supervision, he built a monastery, a big prayer hall, the Buddha's residential hut in the centre (*Gandha Kutir*), monks' quarters all around, ponds, etc., in the Jetavana. He also constructed resting houses in between Rajagriha and Shravasti to be used during the sojourn of the Buddha and his followers. Jetavana was dedicated to the Buddhist Order with great devotion and celebration.

Prasenjit, the king of Koshala empire, whose sister had married Bimbisāra, also became the Buddha's disciple. Apart from Anāthapindada and Prasenjit, the Buddhist monastery received patronage from another person—Viśākhā, wife of a wealthy merchant at Shravasti. Her story would be mentioned later. Due to the tremendous financial patronage of such wealthy and devoted followers, Shravasti became the most important place for the Buddhistic monastic life. It was from this place that many ladies such as Utpalvarnā, Patāchārā joined the Buddhistic Order as nuns. Shravasti became the Buddha's most important headquarter. He spent twenty-five rainy seasons there. As many as 871 discourses contained in the Sutta-Pitaka were delivered and 416 canonical Jataka stories were told by the Buddha at Shravasti.* It is possible that monasteries at other places were not as well organised as at Shravasti, and the Buddha's sermons at other places were not so well-recorded.

From Shravasti, the Buddha went back to Rajagriha. It was probably during the third or fourth rainy season (after his enlightenment) when he was residing in Venuvana near Rajagriha, that the Buddha met Jivaka, the court physician of Magadha. Abhaya was Bimbisāra's son born to one of his mistresses. When Abhaya grew up, he was impressed by the beauty of Amrapali, the courtesan of Vaishali. Abhaya cohabited with another courtesan, Salavati, and Jivaka was born to them. Neglected by his mother, Jivaka went to Taxila to learn medicine and surgery. He specialised in medicinal plants and related therapy. His professional fame spread far and wide. He cured many patients including some in Saket (Ayodhya),

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*Trevor Ling, *The Buddha*, p. 100.

Pradyot, the king of Ujjain, who was suffering from jaundice, and Bimbisāra, his own grandfather who let him settle permanently at Rajagriha. Jivaka came to the limelight by curing Gautama Buddha of a severe constipation, and then becoming the Buddha's devoted lay disciple.

At this time, an epidemic broke out at Vaishali. This Vaishali Kingdom (north of the Ganges) was in reality a confederation or republic of many tribal chiefs who were residing together with a democratic spirit. They were known as Licchavis or Vrijis. They were martial as well as democratic in political matters. Like Sakyas, they were proud of their abilities, and often married within their own clans. When the epidemic broke out, the Jainas or Tirthankaras—wandering nude ascetics whom the people of Vaishali revered—could not render any help. The Buddha moved to Vaishali with his followers, provided relief work, and brought the epidemic under control. The Buddhists described this achievement later as a 'miracle'. Since that time, the people of Vaishali started embracing Buddhism. A rich merchant named Goshringi donated Kutāgāra Hall in the *Śal* forest near Vaishali for the accommodation of the Buddhist monks.

At that time, the Buddha heard about the dispute regarding the use of the water of the river Rohini (which meets Mahananda and then Rapti near Gorakhpur). Sakyas and Koliyas residing on the opposite sides of the river were nearly engaged in an impending bloody battle. The Buddha argued with them that human lives were more precious than river water, a compromise on which was always possible. Both sides realised the quality of a 'Chakravarti-King' which the Buddha possessed. 250 young men from each of the warring sides embraced Buddhism. About this time, Gautama's father King Suddhodana fell ill and expired after his son had come to see him for the last time.

The widowed queen Mahāprajāpati or Mahagautami decided to become a nun. Accompanied by the wives of five hundred warriors who had renounced the world a short while ago, Mahāprajāpati approached the Buddha, her step-son. She argued that her own son having become a monk, husband dead and grandson Rahula ordained as a novice, it was appropriate for her to renounce the world. The Buddha rejected this plea three times and returned to Vaishali. Undaunted, Mahāprajāpati and her five hundred young lady companions cut off their hair, took begging bowls and proceeded barefooted towards Vaishali. When they arrived at Kutāgāra Hall, Ānanda, the Buddha's cousin and now disciple, was deeply moved, and asked the Buddha whether ladies also were not competent to embrace the lives of renunciation and *Nirvāṇa* : "Are Buddhas born into the world only for the benefit of men ?" The Buddha ultimately agreed, and for the first time in the history of the world, an Order of nuns was established. The Buddha was nevertheless apprehensive regarding the outcome of this decision. He said, "If women were not admitted to the Order, then would the Good Law endure for a thousand years, but now it will stand for five hundred years only. When women retire from the household to the home-less life under a doctrine and discipline, the norm will not long endure." Yaśodharā heard this good news, and she also rushed to Vaishali and met Mahāprajāpati. The Buddha had gone to Shravasti by that time, and Yaśodharā ultimately met her husband and teacher at Shravasti to join this Order of nuns. Mahānāma, the Buddha's cousin brother, became the next King of Kapilavastu.

The monastery at Shravasti was expanded to accommodate the increasing number of monks and nuns separately. The presence of nuns also attracted devoted ladies of Shravasti like Patāchārā (who had lost her parents, husband and sons) to join the Order. Patāchārā herself brought in 500 other nuns. Amongst the reputed nuns were Mahāprajāpati, Utpalvarna, Patāchārā, Bhadrā Kāpilāni, formerly wife of Mahākashyap, Kshemā (wife of King Bimbisāra) who was once very proud of her beauty, Krishā Gautami and so on.

Viśākhā, the magnificent lady donor, was almost like a mother to the Order. Daughter of a wealthy merchant Dhananjoy, who had migrated from Anga (East India) to

Rajagriha and then Saket (Ayodhya), Visakha got married with Purnavardhana, son of another wealthy merchant Mrigāra who was living at Shravasti. Born and brought up in affluence, Visakha had a tremendous strength of character coupled with physical vitality and strength. Immediately after her marriage, she found that her father-in-law was a disciple of the famous naked Tirthankar (Jaina) hermit Nirgrantha Jnatiputra who was better known as Vardhamana, the founder of the sect of Jainas. Visakha was repelled by the nudity of the hermit, and persuaded her father-in-law to accept the Buddha as their teacher. Thereafter, Visakha made very good use of the family treasures towards the upkeep of the Buddhist Order.

On one occasion, Visakha asked for eight boons from the Buddha. She sought permission from the Lord : "Through all my life, I may bestow robes for the rainy season on the Sangha, food for incoming bhikkus or monks, food for outgoing bhikkus, food for the sick, food for those who wait upon the sick, medicine for the sick, a constant supply of rice-milk for the Sangha, and bathing robes for the bhikkunis, the sisters."

She also explained why she was making such pious requests. For most of the eight resolves, the motivations were transparent and obvious. She had heard that the Buddha appreciated nutritional values of rice-milk. The bhikkus and bhikkunis (monks and nuns) did not have extra clothes, and therefore had to stay nude on many occasions during bath or in rainy seasons. The young nuns while taking bath in the Rapti river were often praised about their beauty by courtesans (who also took bath in adjacent places), and often tempted by the courtesans to adopt easy lives. (Some of these courtesans even had the audacity to come and dance before the Buddha under drunken condition, only to be reformed spiritually by the Master.) Such scenes were 'disgusting and revolting' to Visakha and other householder devotees. The ultimate motivation Visakha had in proposing these life-term donations, was to obtain moral satisfaction and spiritual bliss through charity for a noble cause. Naturally, the Buddha agreed to her request, and furthermore, blessed her. She came to be known as *Mrigāramātā* (since she reformed Mrigāra, her father-in-law), and *Sanghamātā* (benefactress of the Sangha). During her advanced age, Visakha sold most of her properties and constructed another monastery east of Shravasti. This monastery known as 'purvaram' was dedicated to the Buddhist Order.

V

Gautama Buddha, apart from spreading his new religion of renunciation and love for all living creatures, was seriously involved in confrontations with the contemporary viewpoints which were partly philosophical and mostly connected with rituals.

The chief competing philosophy at that time was Brahminical. The Hindu society was frozen into four caste-divisions headed by the Brahmins, who were more interested in the ritual parts of the Vedas, particularly Atharva Veda, rather than in the lofty truths of the Vedanta. The Vedic rituals recommended various kinds of animal sacrifices to propitiate different categories of gods which included fire. Bimbisāra used to respect a Brahmin named Kutadanta, who recommended slaughter of animals for religious purposes. The Buddha persuaded him about the futility of such sacrifices. Real sacrifices which help in spiritual upliftment were, according to the Buddha, offering alms to the Shramanas, to help building a Vihara for them, to accept the Enlighened as the teacher, the Sangha and the eternal principles of morality (*Dharma*), and lastly to sacrifice the easy life of a householder and sensual pleasures and strive for *Nirvāṇa*. On many other occasions, the Buddha persuaded Kings and Brahmins to desist from animal-killing in the name of religion. There were incidents when he offered himself to substitute the animals brought before the sacrificial altar. Speaking about the qualities of an ideal Buddhist monk, he said, "Let him not use Atharva-Vedic spells, nor things foretell from dreams or signs or stars; let not my follower predict from cries, cure barrenness, nor practise quackery. He is not to learn or teach the low arts of divination, astrology, sacrifices to gods, witchcraft and quackery." An average householder of his time (like probably many people even today) was interested in the magical principles of religion. But the Buddha forbade his followers to exploit this weakness, as they did at Vaishali at the time of the epidemic. Much against his wish, his followers tended to exhibit supernatural powers, if they ever could and to attribute the Buddha's success in the country to his power of performing miracles.

Even before the Buddha, the country produced many seekers of truth who did not believe in the Brahminical texts. Kapila, the great sage, propounded the Saṁkhya philosophy, which was agnostic or atheistic, and strove for discovering the causal principles in nature. It is said that the Buddha, born in the city named after him, was influenced by his predecessor. For centuries, India had produced Ajivakas, the wandering monks who did not believe in the Vedas. The Buddha had been one of them in some of his earlier births as Bodhisattva. Let us now mention some non-Brahminic philosophers who lived during the Buddha's era and with whom the Buddha partly or wholly disagreed.*

Kora Kshatriya used to live around Vaishali, and believed in austerities of all kinds. His body was smeared in ashes, and he would not use his hands while eating and drinking. A Buddhist disciple named Sunakshatra was impressed by his austerities, and left the Buddhist fold. It may be recalled that the Buddha himself practised austerities before his Enlightenment, and later realised the futility of such exclusively physical efforts.

Kakuda Katyayana and Purana Kashyapa developed the Ajivaka philosophy which was finally coordinated by Maskari Gosaliputra. The Buddhists used to make derogatory remarks

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*Trevor Ling, *The Buddha*. Chaptes 5 and 7.

about their 'humble' origin (born of slave women, birth at Gośālā or cow-shed, etc.) and their 'escapist' attitude (escaped from their status as bonded labour). Kakuda Katyayana and his followers avoided using cold water which had living creatures. Purana Kashyapa used to stay naked, and his disciples performed many odd austerities; while he lived near Shravasti, he lost influence over his eighty thousand disciples, because he could not compete with the Buddha in religious discourses; consequently, he committed suicide by drowning himself in water.

Maskari Gosaliputra developed the Ajivaka philosophy which was fatalistic, and did not accept the notion of *Karma* which was an essentially Vedic doctrine and approved by the Buddhists as well as the Jainas. To the Ajivakas, the whole universe was guided by a causal system, in which all events were completely determined by cosmic principles and over which there was no control. Thus, there was no special merit in good work according to them. 'In generosity, in self-mastery, in control of the senses, in speaking truth,' said Purana Kashyapa, 'there is no merit'. Still, they believed in ascetic life, since that would bring peace and perfection, and because, there is an 'inevitable' law that 'all beings are destined to attain perfection'. Such an apathetic attitude to *Karma* and the doctrine of good work was not acceptable to the Buddhists or the Jainas and not even to the masses. It is said that Ajatasatru, son of Bimbisāra, reacted very coldly when he heard the exposition of the amoral Ajivaka philosophy.

Sanjayi Bairathputra was also an Ajivaka, under whom Sariputra and Maudgallayana studied as disciples. He was renowned for his non-committal approach and disdain for the speculative aspects of philosophy. Known as the leader of the agnostic school, he maintained that no final position of 'truth' could ever be reached. The Buddhists branded him and his followers as 'eel-wrigglers', wriggling out of every question. This was probably an unkind appraisal since even the Buddha used similar ambiguous expressions about the nature of truth which was difficult to describe. Sanjayi avoided argumentativeness which according to him 'produces only ill temper'. Cultivation of friendship and pursuit for the peace of mind were in his opinion two laudable goals in life. He also maintained that a man is destined to be re-born only as a human being and not as any other creature such as animals. The Hindus and Buddhists did not agree with him on this.

Ajita Keśakambala believed in Lokāyata or materialistic philosophy which was a developed form of Sāṁkhya philosophy and may be taken as a primitive precursor to modern science. According to this Lokāyata philosophy, every material is made up of constituent elements—such as the earth, air, fire and water —and to which they revert on destruction and decomposition (as in the case of human body and other organic materials). Even consciousness was the product of chemical interaction of such constituents, and therefore does not survive after the death of a human being. Ajita rejected the principle of *Karma* or the long-term consequences of moral or immoral action particularly after death. Ajita's goal was however to coordinate human actions so as to 'optimise happiness of living creatures; and on this count, indiscriminate destruction of animal or even vegetable life could be considered as undesirable, though not morally reprehensible. Ajita was not a happy-go-lucky person but stayed as a shaven-headed ascetic.

Nirgrantha Jnātiputra (one who has severed all links with relatives), as he was called by the Buddhists, is better known as Vardhamāna or Mahāvira, by the Jaina community. Mahāvira was formerly associated with the Ajivaka leader Maskariputra Goshali, but later disagreed with the Ajivakas on the question of the freedom of the will. He asserted that every living being is a transmigrating soul, and choosing morally wholesome actions, can wear out *Karma* or the effects of the past immoral actions. He approved the practice of austerities (he did not wear any cloth) as a step towards avoiding bad *Karma* such as destroying life in any form. His commitment to *Ahimsā* and vegetarian food was total, a position more rigorous than that of the Buddha. He and his followers were not enthusiastic about the Buddha's concept of *Anatta* or absolute impermanence of all things, which, they believed, does not fit in with the necessity for good *Karma*. On this ground, Mahāvira dissuaded a Vaishali general, Simha or Singha from meeting the Buddha. However, Singha disobeyed Mahāvira, his teacher, and learnt from the Buddha that the concepts of impermanence (or state of flux for the universe) and *Karma* are not irreconcilable. The Jainas reacted very strongly to the Buddha's 'denial of permanent individuality or self' which they said is a 'pernicious view'.

The Buddha preferred a middle path avoiding the extremities of senseless physical austerity on the one hand, and on the other, wreckless life of sensual pleasure and denial of *Karma* or freedom from responsibility for human action. Regarding denial of 'self' he has been misunderstood, notwithstanding his several valiant efforts for lucid clarification, just as he himself had misunderstood the concept of 'Ātman' as propounded in the Vedic literature.

It is clear from the above discussion that not all of the 'opponents' the Buddha had were fake people as the later-day Buddhists would like us to believe. Mahāvira or Nirgrantha Jnātiputra, in particular, was great in moral and intellectual stature, and in terms of popularity was second only to the Buddha himself. He had followers at Rajagriha, Vaishali and Shravasti, and his religion Jainism continued to attract, for centuries, disciples and spiritual aspirants many of whom reached great spiritual heights and were regarded as Tirthankaras (spiritual teachers) or Jinas (victors of spiritual truth). The great Buddhist King Ashoka's mother was strongly attracted to the doctrines of the Ajivakas, and his grandfather, Chandragupta the Maurya, was an adherent of Jainism towards the end of his life, and spent his last days at the famous Jaina shrine of Śrāvanabelagola near Mysore.

VI

It was around 523 B.C., when the Buddha was forty years old and spending the sixth rainy season at Shravasti, that he had to confront the Tirthikas and establish the superiority of his religion. It seems that there was a debate in the presence of the King Prasenjit, and the Buddha's views were upheld. The chroniclers of the Buddha's life however wrote that the Buddha performed a series of miracles which could not be equalled by Purana Kashyapa, so that the latter lost his entire following and ultimately committed suicide. Then, the Buddha, who had earlier levitated himself in the sky, went to the Heavens, and as the story goes, stayed there for three months with his mother and Gods, and later descended on to the city of Sankashya (near Kanyakubja and Farrukhabad). This story however does not fit in with the Buddha's own exhortation to his disciple Pindola-Bharadvaja, against any exhibition of miraculous powers: 'This will not conduce to the conversion of the unconverted, nor to the advantage of the converted.' It is likely that the Buddha established his supremacy through character, intellect, logic and compassion. His absence from Shravasti for several months at this stage could possibly be accounted by his tour up to Taxila, way back to Sankashya, down the Ganges to Kanyakubja, Prayag and Varanasi, and finally return to Shravasti. (This trip has been chronicled to have taken place after the tenth rainy season instead of the sixth after his enlightenment.)

Be that as it may, the Buddha continued to receive opposition from mean-minded persons (at times coming from his own order!) The defeated Tirthikas induced a young woman Chincha Manabika to humiliate the Buddha through a dirty character-slander. She was visiting the Shravasti monastery regularly, when she contrived a means to appear pregnant. In the ninth month, she hurled the open accusation that she was about to deliver the Buddha's son! Somehow the wooden globe came out of her dresses, and she was suitably punished.

Thirty miles away from Allahabad, and situated on the Jamuna river, was situated Kaushambi – the capital of Udayan's Kingdom. Udayan s minister Ghosit had donated a piece of land near Kaushambi and the monastery built there was known as Ghositaram. (King Udayan built a statue of the Buddha made of red sandalwood, which was later seen by Hiuen Tsang.)

During the ninth rainy season, while the Buddha was there, a serious rift developed amongst the monks over a trifling matter. A monk had inadvertently mixed up two different kinds of water, kept separately for drinking and ablutions. Another monk severely reprimanded the first one, who would not apologise. Most of the monks took sides on the question of rules and discipline. The Buddha counselled one side that mistakes had to be owned and rectified through expressions of regret and apologies; he also advised the other side to practise forbearance since an exclusively punishing attitude does not usher in harmony or even discipline. This 'neutral' stand did not satisfy either group who went on quarrelling, and ultimately the matter was precipitated, when one monk Vinayadhar expelled another monk named Sutrantik from the Order. The Buddha left Kaushambi with the remark that the Enlightened should live alone if he cannot usher in harmony amongst his colleagues. He travelled through the village of Balakalonkar and Rakkhitaram grove at Parileyyaka, staying mostly alone, before returning to Shravasti.

In the meantime, the lay disciples of Kaushambi were disgusted with the quarrelling monks, and started disrespecting them. At last the monks recovered their senses, proceeded to Shravasti, met the Buddha and restored harmony amongst themselves.

When Mahāprajāpati and Yaśodharā joined the Order as nuns, Rahula was still a minor, and he spent his novice period in various monasteries. His father, the Buddha, always chastened him to improve his manners and conduct, so that the boy really came up to the highest standard of ethics. During the fourteenth rainy season, Rahula was finally ordained to the full monkhood. At this time, the Buddha again visited his birthplace. While he was roaming in the city with his begging bowl, his father-in-law, Suprabuddha, the Koliya king, abused him under drunken condition. The Buddha predicted that Suprabuddha shall die in seven days as a punishment for his evil action.

For several years, the Buddha visited several monasteries, apart from the famous ones, such as one at Atabi on the Ganges (near Arrah ?), Chalika, etc.

During the twentieth rainy season (509 B. C.) when he was 54 years old and staying at Shravasti, he wanted to be served by a constant companion-monk in view of his advancing age. Sariputra and Maudgallayana were not accepted, since they were far advanced in spiritual matters and had to do many official works. The humble disciple and his cousin-brother Ānanda was chosen for this honourable duty, which he discharged till the Buddha's *Parinirvaṇa* (death)—a quarter century later. During this period, Ānanda was the chief custodian of the Buddha's uttered thoughts and messages.

The Buddha brought to his fold, spiritual aspirants from diverse walks of life—not only Brahmins, warriors, merchants, princes, etc., but also many low caste people and even murderous dacoits like Angulimala and courtesans like Amrapali.

Angulimala was born in a decent family of Shravasti. His father Bhargava was a priest serving the king. Well-educated at Taxila, Angulimala later turned to be a fierce dacoit. He operated in the forests adjoining Shravasti and used to slay wanderers and keep their fingers (*anguli*—hence his name Angulimala). When King Prasenjit decided to lead his army for capturing this much-dreaded bandit, Angulimala's mother became anxious to save her son. She wanted to proceed to the forest and entreat him to change his life, even though she herself was likely to be murdered by her son. In such a tense situation, the Buddha proceeded alone to the forest to meet Angulimala who was keen to murder his hundredth victim, as if it would be a religious feat. Angulimala saw the Buddha and ran after him, but even after hours of chasing, the distance between the two did not diminish. When the tired and perplexed bandit asked the Buddha to stop, the Buddha asked him to stop also, and advised him to follow the path of conscience and righteousness. It was a genuine miracle which changed the bandit's heart and this was possible probably because the bandit, notwithstanding his misdeeds, was ready for the spiritual path. Angulimala had created such a terror in the kingdom that even the king, not to speak of the public, was afraid to see the changed man who had joined the Buddha as a disciple. It was at times difficult for the monk Angulimala to receive alms from the frightened householders who would close the door before him. Angulimala was repentant for his past misdeeds; the Buddha asked him to forget his past and cheerfully pursue the spiritual path.

At this time, the Tirthikas again tried to humiliate the Buddha through a sinister plot. They murdered a courtesan, Sundari by name, and dumped the corpse near the Buddha's hut. A rumour was spread that it was the Buddha who had illicit link with the courtesan and then murdered her. Very soon the public saw through this mischievous slander on the character of the holiest man in the country, and the slanderers were exposed.

Anathapindada at this time gave away his daughter in marriage with a young merchant in Anga (Eastern India) who was a follower of the Ajivakas. His daughter persuaded her husband and other family members to embrace Buddhism. In this connection, the Buddha visited Anga province and left Aniruddha there to carry on further evangelical work. The Buddha probably visited Champā (now Bhagalpur) and Kajangala (Karagola near the Bihar-West Bengal border ?).

The period 508 B.C. to 490 B.C. in the Buddha's life has not been well chronicled, probably because nothing spectacular happened in the socio-political framework of the country, and the Master's annual and daily routines were of a repetitive and regular nature.

For the three months during the rainy seasons, the Buddha would suspend his itinerant operations and spend a quiet time in the spiritual practices and religious discourses with his disciples. During the fair weather, he would move from town to town and village to village with his large band of followers—often receiving shelter from local people, who pined for his soothing religious advice. Through the munificence of kings and merchants, a large number of monasteries or *Viharas* were set up 'not too far from, nor yet too near the town'. Most of these gardens were provided with cloisters, storerooms, lotus pools, and green foliage of trees inviting peaceful meditation. Often, lay disciples or kings or merchants would invite the Buddha and the monks of his order for midday lunch, after which the Master would address them on spiritual matters.

'If the day be not filled by an invitation, the Buddha, according to monastic usages, undertakes his circuit of the village or town in quest of alms. He, like his disciples, rises early, when the light of dawn appears in the sky, and spends the early moments in spiritual exercises or in converse with his disciples, and then he proceeds with his companions towards the town. One might day by day see that man who was reputed throughout India even in his time, and before whom kings bowed themselves, walking about, alms-bowl in hand, through streets and alleys, from house to house, and without uttering any request, with downcast look, stand silently waiting until a morsel of food was thrown into his bowl'. (Description by Oldenberng in his work *Buddha*.)

In the afternoon, the Buddha would retire, after eating the offered food, to solitary contemplation and rest in his chamber or under the trees till the evening came and drew him once more to the crowd awaiting his discourses. On such a typical evening, October or *Kārtika* full-moon to be precise, Bimbisāra's son Ajatasatru, who had murdered his father and opposed the Buddha, changed his mind at the advice of Jivaka, the court-physician. The king ordered elephants to be prepared and the royal procession moved with burning torches on that moonlit night through the gate of Rajagriha to Jivaka's mango-grove, where the Buddha delighted the king with his famous discourse 'on the fruits of asceticism'.

VII

The Last Eight Years

The patricidal king Ajātaśatru ultimately followed his father Bimbisāra's footsteps in embracing Buddhism, but not before a turbulent period, which was linked with political upheavals in the Kingdoms of Magadha, Koshala, as well as Kapilavastu, and which was interlinked with the Buddha's life and the Buddhist movement themselves.

This crucial period started in 491 B.C. when the Buddha was 72 years old. The Buddha's disciple as well as cousin or brother-in-law, Devadata, was smitten with the evil spirits of rivalry and jealousy, ever since he was defeated as a young man in the game of archery by Prince Gautama. Even though he renounced the world as the Buddha's disciple along with the other Sakya princes such as Ānanda and Āniruddha, and lived a monastic life for 36 years under one of the greatest spiritual teachers ever born, his heart remained unchanged. It is not known whether he was affected by the political disputes between the Sakya and Koliya clans, or whether he was adversely affected by his father Suprabuddha who had met his punishment after abusing the Buddha, At any rate, the fire of ego and jealousy in his heart could not be quenched by his outwardly 'spiritual' practices.

One day, Devadatta proposed that in view of the Buddha's advanced age, the leadership of the congregation should be vested in himself. His egoistic move was transparent, and his proposal was flatly turned down. Devadatta became sulky and the Buddha advised his disciples to be careful about Devadatta. Devadatta could not persuade the kings like Bimbisāra or Prasenjit (who were loyal to the Buddha) to his point of view, and yet he needed some royal patronage. Therefore, he developed intimacy with Bimbisāra's son Ajatasatru, the Magadha prince who built a separate monastery for Devadatta and arranged regular food for him and some of his disciples. At this stage, Devadatta again approached the Buddha and asked him to at least give him hierarchical recognition superior to Sariputra and Maudgallayana. Even this was refused since the Buddha had made up his mind about this egoistic 'monk' or a monster.

Then Devadatta laid his masterly devilish strategy. He persuaded Ajatasatru to murder his father and usurp the throne. Ajatasatru was shaky when he went with a sword to kill his saintly father, Bimbisāra, who voluntarily and affectionately resigned in favour of his son. Goaded by Devadatta, Ajatasatru threw his father to prison to avoid all risks, and ultimately killed him through starvation. Ajatasatru's mother tried to save her husband but failed. This enraged her brother, king Prasenjit of Shravasti, who snatched the province of Varanasi which had been given to Bimbisāra as a marriage-gift by Prasenjit's father. This led to prolonged warfare between the two kingdoms. Much later, peace prevailed, probably through patient counselling on both the sides.

Devadatta grew more aggressive after Bimbisāra's death, and now he secured Ajatasatru's permission to murder the Buddha! Thirty-one archers were hired to do this dirty job, but when they approached the Buddha, their criminal hearts were magically transformed into a state of repentance, and they joined the Buddha's Order. Devadatta's next move was to throw a boulder from the hill-top which would kill the Buddha while he would be passing by. Luckily the boulder got fragmented while moving down-hill, and the Buddha got hurt by only a small splinter. The physician Jivaka took the Buddha to his mango-grove and treated him so that the wound was healed. A third attempt was made by Devadatta on the Buddha's life by goading a mad elephant Nalagiri, which was rendered intoxicated through liquor, on his path. The Buddha prevented his disciples to go ahead of him, and when he found that a woman with a baby in her arms fell between him and the mad elephant, he 'talked' to the elephant Nalagiri and urged him to perform his assigned task of killing the Buddha and spare the woman with the child instead. The elephant seemed to understand, felt repentant and bowed himself before the Buddha. The Buddha blessed the elephant in the presence of a spell-bound crowd. The Buddha realised that he had unwittingly demonstrated a miracle in public, which was not his usual practice. He therefore hurriedly returned to the monastery with his begging bowl without seeking alms in the same place.

By this time, Ajatasatru had understood Devadatta's devilish character and started repenting for his own misdeeds. A son was born to him, and he wondered whether he would be later treated by his own son the way he butchered his father. He stopped sending food and other support for Devadatta's monastery. When Devadatta went to the city with his begging bowl, the citizens, now well aware about his dirty intrigues, broke his begging bowl.

At last, Devadatta approached the Buddha again, and offered to rejoin his Order and settle the 'dispute' (as if he and the Buddha were ever on equal terms) on certain conditions. Devadatta insisted that the Buddha should enforce stricter ascetic rules for the monks, so that they would clothe themselves only in rags cast off in cremation grounds, dwell as forest hermits, accept no invitation, and abstain from fish and meat. The Buddha rejected these suggestions since he was always against undue austerity, untidiness, nudity, etc., and did not recommend uncompromising vegetarianism. While animal killing could not be indulged by the monks, fish or meat if provided on the begging bowl could not be rejected. He would not enforce such rules although people were free to practise such austerities voluntarily. Devadatta made those proposals from a tactical point of view, and not from his 'love of austerity'. He knew that a part of the society admired Jainas and Ajivakas regarding their over-austere and vegetarian habits. So when the Buddha turned down Devadatta's proposals, Devadatta could manage to split the Order on such issues, and with five hundred dissenters, who had been recent converts, went to Gaya. Amongst the old-timers who had joined Devadatta was Kokalik, a Sakya aristocrat.

After some time, Sariputra and Maudgallayana went to Gaya, and Devadatta erroneously concluded that they were also deserters. He allowed Sariputra and Maudgallayana to preach before the five hundred recent converts while he went to sleep. The Buddha's trusted disciples were able to persuade the five hundred young men to desert Devadatta and come back to Rajagriha the same night. The next day morning, Kokalik discovered what had happened and hit Devadatta (in despair), who vomited blood. Devadatta realised that his game was up, and now he decided to meet the Buddha again, and tender his much-belated apology. However, he died on his way to Jetavana where the Buddha was staying at that time. The Buddhist lore reports that the earth cracked, and this sinner was engulfed in fire rising from the hell.

King Ajatasatru by this time was thoroughly repentant and suffered from the pangs of conscience, having murdered his father and having been a party to the nearly fatal attacks on the Buddha. He found no comfort in the doctrines of the Ajivaka teachers. On the advice of his physician Jivaka, he sought pardon, blessings and discipleship from the Buddha, which he received in full measure. It was probably Jivaka and the Buddha himself who helped in restoring harmony between the two kings, Ajatasatru and his uncle Prasenjit.

Prasenjit was due to receive another shock, and this time not from his nephew but from his son Birudhaka. This happened around 485 B.C. during the seventh year of Ajatasatru's reign and two years before the Buddha expired.

Prasenjit had several more wives besides Mallika, the principal queen. When Prasenjit had wanted to marry in the Sakya community, Mahānāmā, who had succeeded Suddhodana as the king of Kapilavastu, was embarrassed because it was not the custom of Sakyas to offer their daughters in marriage to other communities. Since Mahānāmā did not want to antagonise Prasenjit, then a powerful king, he sent his daughter Vasavakshatriya, whose mother however was a low-caste slave girl named Nagamunda (this fact was not divulged to Prasenjit). Birudhaka was born out of wedlock between Prasenjit and Vasavakshatriya probably when the Buddha was in his late fifties.

As a young man, Birudhaka visited Kapilavastu around 485 B.C., and was given a very cold reception because of his low pedigree, and since his mother was not an acknowledged princess of Kapilavastu. When Birudhaka came to know of the whole background, he sought revenge on both the kingdoms of Koshala and Kapilavastu. Aided by a general, Dirghacharayana, he dethroned his father Prasenjit who had desired to banish Birudhaka and Vasavakshatriya for their low caste (The Buddha however counselled Prasenjit against that step). Prasenjit fled, and died very soon through exposure, while he was on his way to his nephew, Ajatasatru. Then Birudhaka went to Kapilavastu, conquered and massacred the Sakyas. As if to complete this tragic story, he and his army, while on return from Kapilavastu, were caught in a flash-flood and perished. This happened one year before the Buddha passed away.

The Last Year

When the Lord had reached his seventy-ninth year, Ajatasatru undertook an unsuccessful war upon the Licchavis or Vajjians of Vaishali. He had sent his minister Bhaskara to consult the Buddha about the possible outcome of this war. The Buddha replied that he had taught the Licchavis or the Vajjians of Vaishali, the true art of a welfare state. 'So long as they hold full and frequent public assemblies, they may be expected not to decline but to prosper. So long as they honour their elders and respect womanhood, so long as they remain religious, the *Vajjis* may be expected not to decline but to prosper.' When Bhaskara left, the Buddha called the monks and set forth forty-one conditions of welfare of a religious order.

"So long as the brethren monks hold full and frequent assemblies, meeting in concord, rising in concord, and attending in concord to the affairs of the Sangha, so long as they do not abrogate that which experience has proved to be good, and introduce nothing except such things as have been carefully tested, so long as the elders practise justice and the brethren esteem, revere and support their elders, so long as the brethren delight in the blessings of religion, not stop on their way to

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Nirvāṇa because they have attained to any lesser things, search after truth, energy, joy, peace, earnest contemplation and equanimity of mind, so that good and holy men shall come to them and dwell among them in quiet—so long the Sangha may be expected not to decline, but to prosper." The Buddha delivered similar sermons to his followers at the Gridhrakut peak (vulture's peak) near Rajagriha and then again at Nalanda.

The Buddha then visited Nalanda (then Nala village), the birth-place of his foremost disciple Sariputra. Here Sariputra declared his teacher to be the greatest of all Buddhas ever born or to be born in future. Gautama Buddha never accepted such high praises, and enquired whether Sariputra really knew the greatnesses of the past and future Buddhas, or even the qualities of his own teacher very well. Sariputra, somewhat embarrassed, replied that he did not possess that much knowledge, but at least he had witnessed the wonderful lineage of the faith and a cross-section of the spiritual panorama extending from the ancient past to the distant future. This answer gladdened the Buddha.

From Nalanda, the Buddha went to Pataliputra (at present Patna) and witnessed that Ajatasatru's men had started war preparations, building fortresses, etc. He predicted a great future for the city 'which however shall be bedevilled by fire, flood and political dissensions'. Crossing the Ganges, he and his followers went to Kotigram and then a village called Nadika. It is here that his constant companion Ānanda raised the topic of expiry of a large number of monks and nuns of the Order. Mahāprajāpati, Yaśodharā and Rahula had expired. When Ānanda enquired about the fate of these monks and nuns after death, the Buddha replied: "Those who have died after the complete destruction of the three bonds of lust, covetousness and egotistical cleaving to existence will not be reborn in a state of suffering. Nothing will remain of them but their good thoughts, their righteous acts and the bliss. Their minds will be reborn in higher states of existence and progress till they reach *Nirvāṇa*, the ocean of truth." The Lord felt that Ānanda's anxiety on such matters, in spite of receiving many sermons on this subject in the past, was wearisome.

Then the Buddha proceeded to Vaishali and stayed at the mango-grove of the courtesan Amrapali. The courtesan was full of devotion to the Lord. She rushed to the garden, clad in a humble dress and invited the Buddha and his disciples for taking meal with her. The Lord accepted the offer, seeing the devotion of the woman. Licchavi princes came to the garden immediately thereafter, and hearing that the Buddha was already invited by the courtesan, wanted to pay money to Amrapali so that they had the honour to serve meal to the Buddha next day. But Amrapali would not trade this singular honour in return of even the entire Vaishali territory. After providing a sumptuous meal, the wonderful courtesan, with a divine heart, donated her entire garden to the Buddhist Order. Much later, after the Buddha's death, Amrapali was advised by her own monk-son, and entered the Order as a devoted nun.

The rainy season was approaching, and the Buddha fell seriously ill at Beluva which was near Vaishali. It was his last retreat. He survived his dire sickness and extreme pain in the body, only to realise that his life was nearing an end. At this stage, Ānanda wanted some parting instructions for the Order from the Buddha, who fittingly replied :

"What does the Order expect of me? I have preached the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine, for in respect of truth I have no such thing as the closed fist of a teacher, who keeps something back.

"The Tathagata (that is the Buddha) does not think that it is he who should lead the brotherhood, or that the Order is dependent upon him. Why then should the Tathagata leave instructions in any matter concerning the Order?

"O Ānanda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Seek salvation alone in the truth. Look not for assistance to any one besides yourselves.*

"Those who, either now or after I am dead, shall be lamps unto themselves, it is they who shall reach the very topmost height. But they must be anxious to learn."

On another occasion, when the Buddha visited the Chapala Shrine, he told Ānanda of his resolve to die within three months. Then he proceeded to the Kutāgāra Sala (Hall) in the Mahavana (great *śal* forest) and announced the same decision to the monks who had gathered there. He exhorted the monks to dedicate their lives for attaining the spiritual truth, and 'for the good and happiness of the great multitudes, out of pity for the world'.** He was going to die, but there need not be any remorse since, as he said, 'all component things must grow old and be dissolved again ; seek for that which is permanent, and work out your salvation with diligence'.

At this time, Sariputra and Maudgallayana expired. Sariputra died on the Kartika (October) full-moon day at the village Barak. Within a fortnight on the same month (new moon), Maudgallayana also expired. It is said that he was hunted and ultimately killed in a cave by some professional criminals employed by the Tirthikas, who wanted to combat the growing influence of Buddhism by such foul means.

Leaving Vaishali, the Buddha proceeded to Pava and stayed at a mango garden owned by Chunda, a blacksmith, worker in metals. Chunda prepared rice cakes and a dish of dried boar's meat. Having eaten this food, the Buddha immediately felt severe stomach pain which later led to dysentery. He did not like

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*'*attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā, dhammadīpā dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā*'

(Mahaparinirvana Sutra, Digha Nikaya, 2.100)

**'*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya arthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam*'

(Mahaparinirvana Sutra, Digha Nikaya, 2.120)

Chunda to be blamed, and in order to save him from embarrassment and remorse, urged Ānanda that the party might proceed towards Kushinagar immediately.

On his way to Kushinagar, the Buddha rested under a tree and felt thirsty. Ānanda brought water for him from a nearby brook. At that time, they encountered a young man Pukkusa, who had been a disciple of Alara Kalama, and who was passing from Kusinara to Pava. Pukkusa narrated the marvellous concentration Alara Kalama had during meditation, and how once he remained oblivious of 500 carts passing by and soiling his dress. The Buddha also narrated, how on one occasion he was totally lost in meditation and remained unaware of heavy rain and lightning in the immediate surrounding, and even of several persons being killed by a thunderbolt. Pukkusa felt impressed and became the Buddha's disciple. The Buddha accepted a golden robe presented by Pukkusa, and wore it. When Ānanda commented that the Buddha's skin seemed to be brighter than the golden robe, the Master indicated that this was a sign that he was going to meet *parinirvāṇa* (passing away) during the third watch of that night in the *śālā* grove of the Mallians.

The Buddha took his bath in the river Kakuttha and proceeded to the śāla grove (named 'Upavattana') of the Mallas on the further side of the river Hiranyavati. Here he wanted to take his final rest. Ānanda spread a couch with its head to the north between the twin śāla trees, and the Buddha laid himself down on his right side, with one leg resting on the other, mindful and self-possessed. He told Ānanda how he was surrounded by Celestial beings and Gods from the heavens paying tributes to him.* But the best tribute that could be given to the Budhha,

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*The original text in Pali describing this is indeed poetic :

'Dasasu lokadhātusu devatā sannipatitā Tathāgatam dossanāya . . .
Dibbāni pi mandāravapuppham chandanachunnāni antalikkhā papatanti,
Tāni Tathāgatasya sariram okiranti ajjhokiranti abhippakiranti
Tathāgatasya pujāya. Dibbāni pi turiyāni antalikkhe vajjanti sangitāni
battanti Tathāgatasya pujāya'

(Mahaparnirva Sutra, Digha Nikaya, 2.137-139)

(*Cont. on next page*)

would come from the devotees following his path, and 'continually fulfilling all the greater and lesser duties'. The devotees in future would visit Kapilavastu, Gaya, Varanasi and Kushinagar for constant inspiration.

Ānanda then retired to the monastery all in tears, because he had not yet experienced the highest spiritual state, and he was losing his Master for good. The Buddha called him back and consoled him. Everything including the human body is perishable. Ānanda should not be aggrieved, take heart and steadily march to the state of *Nirvāṇa*. When Ananda regretted that the Buddha shall be very much missed, the Lord assured, 'I am not the first Buddha who came upon the Earth, nor shall I be the last. In due time, another Buddha will arise in the world, a supremely enlightened one known as Maitreya, kindness personified.'

The Buddha then asked Ānanda to call the lay disciples from Kushinagar so that the young and old Mallas could see their Master for the last time. Even at this late stage, a young spiritual aspirant named Subhadra approached the Buddha with sincere questions, and the Buddha obliged him, much against Ānanda's wish that the dying saint should not be disturbed. Subhadra had been attracted by Ajivakas or Tirthikas 'some of whom were esteemed as good men by many' and wanted to know from the Buddha whether according to him some of them were not truly enlightened people. The Buddha did not give his personal estimates beyond the remark that different religious doctrines and disciplines may produce men of true sainthood *only if* the Aryan Eightfold Path of conduct is honoured and pursued in practice. In other words, moral character alone can assure spiritual upliftment. Subhadra was impressed and became the last disciple of the Buddha.

(*Cont. from previous page*)

'Gods of the ten world systems assembled to behold the Tathagata ... Heavenly Mandarava flowers and sandalwood powder came falling from the sky, descended, sprinkled and scattered themselves over the body of Tathagata. Heavenly music was sounded and heavenly songs came wafted from the skies out of reverence for the Tathagata'.

There was no other question from the audience in spite of the Buddha's offer to clear further doubts and misgivings. The disciples were too overwhelmed with reverence and emotion for their great spiritual leader to ask questions. The Buddha blessed them by saying that even the most backward of his disciples was not likely to suffer from ignorance, and exhorted them with the parting advice : "Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your salvation with diligence."* Uttering these last words, the Buddha fell into a deep meditation and entered *Nirvāṇa.*

The monks and lay disciples burst into lamentations, when Aniruddha asked them to control their emotions and remember the great teacher's parting sermons. Aniruddha and Ānanda spent the rest of the night in religious discourse.

Next day morning, the Mallas of Kushinagar came with perfumes and garlands, and arranged mourning celebrations for six days, befitting one of the greatest teachers that would ever be born on the earth. On the seventh day, the body was taken for cremation, but strangely, the funeral pyre could not be lit till the party of five hundred monks led by Maha Kashyapa arrived at the site starting from Pava and offered their last homage to the departed leader. The Buddha's remains were divided into several parts and distributed by the Mallas of Kushinagar to other kings such as Ajatasatru of Magadha, Licchavis or Vajjians of Vaishali, Sakyas, Koliyas, etc. Excellent monuments (*stupas*) were created by the kings and admirers in the memory of the Enlightened, the Tathagata, which would inspire the mankind for centuries.

Immediately after the Buddha's passing away, the disciples came together and discussed ways and means to keep their organisation strong and movement pure. Aniruddha agreed with Upali that it was necessary to obey and uphold the laws enunciated by the Buddha for the Sangha (organisation). It was much more important however, he said, to uphold the truth which is the very essence of religion : 'Many regulations of the Sangha are temporary; they were prescribed because they suited the occasion and were needed for some transient emergency. The truth, however, is not temporary.' The monks decided to arrange their first Convention at Rajagriha to collect and collate the sacred sayings, and to lay down the pure doctrines of the Buddha, which would inspire generations to come.

**vayadhammā sankhārā, appamādena sampādetha*

(Mahaparinirvana Sutra, Digha Nikaya, 2.156)

2

The Key Message of the Buddha

Since his boyhood, Gautama had searched for the eternal truth, the purpose of life, the firm ground on which the ideal human and social life could be based. In the procession of aging, disease and death, no 'firm ground' or *dharma* could be discovered. The life of a monk attracted him, and then through many sacrifices, sufferings, trials and meditations, he achieved the '*nirvāṇa*' or absolute knowledge.

Then, the problem came to his mind : how to narrate his spiritual vision, his experiences and message to the world, "Should I preach the doctrine and mankind not comprehend it, it would bring me only fatigue and trouble." The lofty vision of *nirvāṇa* that he experienced was indeed "incomprehensible and mysterious to those whose minds were beclouded with worldly interests". Yet he resisted the temptation of enjoying the bliss of *nirvāṇa* alone, and decided to spread the divine message to the whole mankind (Carus, 37; MV. I, 5).

The Buddha resolved to avoid the intricacies of metaphysics, and make his message pure and simple. He thought that the men of the world are like children loving to hear tales. "Therefore I will tell them stories to explain the glory of Dharma." Much later, he narrated to his favourite disciple

Ānanda how he spoke to his audience "*in their language*, and then with religious discourse, instructed, quickened and gladdened them".

"Both the ocean and my doctrine become *gradually* deeper. Both cast out dead bodies upon the dry land" (Carus, 139-140; MPN, III, 22; Chullavagga IX, 1-4).

When Bharadvaja, a wealthy Brahmin farmer, rebuked the Buddha for begging, and asked him to plough, sow and then eat through hard work, how beautifully the Buddha replied that he also ploughed, sowed and ate in his own way :

"Faith is the seed I sow; good works are the rain that fertilizes it; wisdom and modesty are the plough; my mind is the guiding-rein; I lay hold of the handle of the law; earnestness is the goad I use; and exertion is my draught-ox. This ploughing is ploughed to destroy the weeds of illusion. The harvest it yields is the immortal fruit of *Nirvāṇa*, and thus all sorrow ends" (Sutra Nipata, 11-15).

The Truths of Tanha, Suffering and its Cessation

Briefly stated, the knowledge of the four-fold truth, *viz.*, suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the noble (Aryan) eightfold remedy of path (*āryam aṣṭāngikam mārgam*) is, according to the Buddha, the best refuge (Dhammapada, 191-192).

Birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful. The Buddha had pondered over this phenomenon since his boyhood, and later spiritually realised that craving (thirst-*trishnā* or *taṇhā*) causes the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, seeking satisfaction now here, now there (Carus, 45). "Desire (tanha and raga), hatred (arati) and illusion (ignorance or *māyā*) are the roots of evil (*māra*)." "The evils of the body are murder, theft, and adultery; of the tongue, lying, slander, abuse, and idle talk; of the mind, covetousness, hatred, and error" (Sutra of Forty-Two Sections).

Thus, the Buddha discovered the law of causation. This is the ancient philosophy of 'karma', according to which living creatures are driven by their own 'samskara' or the ego-pattern in their previous births. The first element of ego is desire or thirst for bodily pleasures. When his son Rahula was born, Gautama uttered: "a son is born, a bond is born". A slim girl of his family, Kisa-Gautami, admired Gautama's beauty and remarked that with such a beautiful husband, wife's thirst (*tanha*) would be satisfied. This remark produced the opposite effect in Gautama's mind. He had already realised that *tanha* cannot bring permanent satisfaction, just as fuel can not pacify a fire.

Gautama had not himself tasted sorrow and suffering which arise due to carnal pursuits of pleasure. Later he told his disciples :

"I was delicate, O monks, excessively delicate. In my father's dwelling, lotus pools had been made...all for my sake... I had three palaces, one for the cold season, one for the hot, and one for the season of rain...." (Anguttara Nikaya—Devaduta Varga 3/38/1, Majjhim, 75).

Then, why the thought of sorrow occurred in his mind ? Gautama had the previous birth's 'Saṁskara', and that drove him to appreciate the sorrow of all living creatures in the universal sense. He resolved: "I should quit this golden prison where my heart lies caged to find the truth for all men's sake" (Lalit-vistara).

The first discovery in his search for truth was that "there is no fire like passion, no capturer like hatred, there is no net like delusion, no torrent like craving" (Dhammapada, 251). His personal fight against these 'daughters' of evil (*Mārā*) started when he tore away from his sleeping wife and new-born son towards the great path of renunciation, and was eventually crowned with spiritual enlightenment. His 'battle with Mārā and his daughters' was allegorical and held in the psychological plane. Once the nature and the cause of universal suffering were known, its remedy and its cessation suggested themselves, and constituted the third and fourth legs of the universal truth. Cessation of suffering for a human being is possible only through complete annihilation of the evils of body and mind, which can be achieved in the eight fold path or ascent of mind.

Arya Ashtangika Marg or Eight fold Noble Path

"Right *views* will be the torch to light his way. Right *aspirations* will be his guide. Right *speech* will be his dwelling-place on the road. His gait will be straight, for it is right *behaviour*. His refreshments will be the right way of earning his *livelihood*. Right *efforts* will be his steps; right *thoughts* his breath, and right *contemplation* will give him the peace that follows in his footprints." (Carus, 42, Mahavarga). One attains *nirvāṇa*, the supreme bliss, only through ethical conduct, liberation of heart and the practice of loving kindness, without which mere meditation would be useless.

"The spokes of the excellent law (*dharma* or the essence of universe) are the rules of pure conduct; justice is the uniformity of their length; wisdom is the tire; modesty and thoughtfulness are the hub in which the immovable axle of truth (*ṛta* or *satya*) is fixed" (Carus, 42).

The themes of the fourfold truth and eightfold path comes back repetitively from the Buddha's exhortations. He converted the Jatila (matted haired) fire-worshippers of Uruvela (Gaya) through a beautiful allegorical sermon :

"Everything, O Jatilas, is burning. The eyes, the senses, the thoughts are burning with the fire of lust. There is anger, there is ignorance, there is hatred and as long as the fire finds inflammable things upon which it can feed, so long will it burn, and there will be birth and death, decay, grief, lamentation, suffering, despair, and sorrow. Considering this, a disciple of the Dharma will see the four noble truths and walk in the eightfold path of holiness" (Carus, 53; Mahavarga, I, 20-21).

Again, he told Rahula, his own son, who asked for 'paternal inheritance' :

"Gold and silver and jewels are not in my possession. But if thou art willing to receive spiritual treasures, and art strong enough to carry them and to keep them, I shall give thee the four truths which will teach thee the eightfold path of righteousness" (Mahavarga).

He who does not see the four noble truths, has still a long path to traverse by repeated births through the desert of ignorance with its mirages of illusion (Carus, 96; SN). Only when the evils of lust and ignorance are annihilated, *puna geham no kāhasi*, the house shall not be built again and there shall be no rebirth (Dhammapada, 154).

Ethical Conduct, the Basis of Spiritual Life

Throughout his long career as the spiritual teacher, the Buddha emphasized on the ethical conduct being the first step for the spiritual ascent of mankind. Evil, according to him, must be conquered by its opposite :

"Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by non-hatred, this is an old rule.

"Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good, the greedy by liberality and the liar by truth" (Carus, 110; Dhammapada).

To the spiritual aspirants, his message for celibacy and attitude towards women reflects the highest Indian tradition :

"Better far with red-hot irons bore out both your eyes, than encourage in yourself sensual thoughts, or look upon a woman's form with lustful desires.... If the woman be old, regard her as your mother, if young, as your sister, if very young, as your child. If ye must speak with her, let it be with a pure heart. Think to yourself, 'I, as a samana (sramana or mendicant), will live in this sinful world as the spotless leaf of the lotus, unsoiled by the mud in which it grows' (Carus, 76-77).

Firmly grounded on ethical conduct, the spiritual aspirant should fill his heart with love and compassion for all living creatures and then enter the world of love.

On Meditations and Spiritual Attainments

The Buddha has described the mental-cum-spiritual exercises through various terminologies such as: *smrityupasthāna*, *bodhi-anga*, *bhāvanā*, *dhyāna*, etc., which are commonly translated as 'meditation'. The four objects of earnest *smrityupasthāna* are: impurity of the body, the evils arising from sensation, evanescence of the world and the permanency of reason, character and the dharma.

The Buddha described meditation on seven kinds of wisdom or Bodhi-anga which included investigation of scripture. The five principal objects of meditation or *bhāvanā* were described by the Buddha as :

Maitrī-bhāvanā or meditation of love: thou must so adjust thy heart that thou longest for the welfare of all beings including the happiness of thine enemies;

Kārunā-bhāvanā or meditation of pity, in which thou thinkest of all beings in distress, vividly representing in thine imagination their sorrows, and anxieties so as to arouse a deep compassion for them in thy soul;

Muditā-bhāvanā or meditation on joy in which thou thinkest of the prosperity of others and rejoicest with their rejoicings;

Aśubha-bhāvanā or meditation on impurity, consequences of evils; and

Upekshā-bhāvanā or the meditation on serenity, in which thou risest above love and hate, joy and sorrow and attain calmness and serenity (Carus; 137-138; 221; Rhys Davids, Buddhism, 170-171).

One has to be earnest in meditation since "non-recitation is the impurity of the seeker and thoughtlessness is the impurity of the watchful" (Dhammapada, 241). The Buddha had desired that his body may perish if he did not succeed in reaching the truth through meditation (Lalita-vistara); but later he dissuaded his disciples against extreme mortification of the body. Nevertheless, his concentration during meditation was phenomenal. He described later, how deeply absorbed in meditation he was in the city of Atuma, where he was oblivious of the heavy rain and lightning killing two peasant brothers and four oxes just outside the dwelling, where he was meditating (Mahaparinirvana Sutra, 4/31-32).

At times, the Buddha would talk about *riddhi,* the dominion of spirit over matter and *samādhi,* moral self-deliverance from passion and vice, but never recommended trances as means of religious devotion. It is only in its later degenerate state, that Buddhism dealt with occult practices, exemption from law of gravitation, transmutation of elements by rituals, etc., which ran counter to the philosophy of the Buddha.

The Buddha had numerous beatic visions (*e.g.*, of Gods visiting him before his death : Mahaparinirvana Sutra), but would not include these as parts of his gospel. He acquired six *abhijñās* (supernatural talents) when attaining perfect enlightenment : celestial eye, celestial ear, power of assuming any form knowledge of pre-existence, knowledge of the minds of all beings and knowledge of the finality of the stream of life. But he claimed that there was nothing supernatural in these *abhijñās* and "every man can attain them" through enlightenment (Carus, 138-139, 219).

Nirvāṇa means extinction of illusion (Theravada) and attainment of the highest truth (Mahayana belief). The Buddha refused to answer whether *nirvāṇa* denotes a final extinction of personality, since an answer, according to him, is not indispensable for a spiritual aspirant to attain *nirvāṇa*. The Buddha was anxious that the aspirant must exert and see for himself, and not indulge in metaphysical speculations.

Wrong Notions about Spiritualism

Quite naturally, the great teacher had to caution his disciples and, through them, the whole world, against wrong notions about spiritualism, particularly those prevalent in the Indian society during his time. According to him, animal sacrifices and other ritualism and astrology, etc., had no place in a truly spiritual life.

"Ignorance only can make these men prepare festivals and hold vast meetings for sacrifices. Far better to revere the truth than try to appease the gods by shedding blood (Carus, p. 28).

"To guard thy home by mysterious ceremonies is not sufficient; thou must guard it by good deeds (p. 116).

"Star-gazing and astrology, forecasting lucky or unfortunate events by signs, prognosticating good or evil, all these are things forbidden (p. 191).

"I forbid you, O bhikkus, to employ any spells or supplications, for they are useless" (p. 98).

During the Buddha's time, many ascetics believed in practising austerities. The Buddha himself resolved "*Ihāsane śushyatu me śarīram...*" (Lalita-vistara)—"let my body perish in my endeavour to attain enlightenment". But later, he realised the futility of self-torturing and annihilating the body which is an instrument in attaining Buddhahood. The five Brahmin ascetics led by Kaundinya were still addicted to the practice of austerity when the Buddha advised them about the 'middle path' during his famous sermon at Varanasi :

"There are two extremes, O bhikkus, which the man, who has given up the world, ought not to follow—self-indulgence and self-mortification.

"Satisfy the necessities of life like the butterfly that sips the flower, without destroying its fragrance or its texture.

"Neither abstinence from fish or flesh, nor going naked, nor sacrificing to Agni, nor reading the Vedas, nor making offering to priests, nor sacrifices to the gods will cleanse a man who is not free from delusions.

"A middle path has been discovered by the Tathagata" (Carus, pp. 41 and 191).

When a monk disciple suffered from a sore on his foot, the Buddha allowed him to use foot-coverings. He himself wore cast off rags for a long time. Later, when he developed a skin disease, King Bimbisāra's physician and his disciple, Jivaka, cured the disease and offered him an excellent cloth brought from Ujjain. Thereafter, the Buddha allowed his disciples to wear either cast off rags or lay robes (Mahavarga, VIII).

On Miracles and Īśvara

The Buddha never claimed any 'supernatural' power which another spiritual aspirant could not attain through four noble paths. Naturally he refuted that there is any 'miracle' in nature.

"The bhikku, who renounces the transient pleasures of the world for the eternal bliss of holiness, performs the only miracle that can truly be called a miracle. Is it not a wonderful thing, mysterious and miraculous that a man who commits wrong can become a saint ? A holy man changes the curses of *karma* into blessings. The desire to perform miracles arises either from covetousness or from vanity" (Carus, p. 136 ; Rhys Davids, Buddhism).

The fascination for miracles has its root in the craving for divine mercy, and the Buddha had to deny the concept of *Iśwara*, the personal god so that human beings could proceed through self-effort. He counselled Anathapindada, the merchant of Sravasti :

"Neither Īśvara, nor the absolute, nor the self, nor causeless chance, is the maker, but our deeds produce results both good and evil according to the law of causation. Let us, then, abandon the heresy of worshipping Īśvara and of praying to him" (Carus, p. 60).

It is doubtful whether, the Buddha was able to turn away the minds of his disciples from the concept of a benevolent protector. Many of them needed a personal God, and since the Buddha would not recommend any God in the heaven, he himself was idolised and worshipped by Buddhists through successive generations !

Self-Effort—the Only Way

Nevertheless, the Buddha was uncompromising on two issues : (a) the futility of metaphysical speculations and (b) the absolute need for self-effort in realising the ultimate truth. Those who speculate on *Brahmā* without meeting him face to face are, according to the great teacher, "like a man in love, who cannot say who the lady is, or like one who builds a staircase without knowing where the palace is to be" (Tevijja-sutta, Digha, i, 235).

His constant advice was : "You yourself must make an effort. The Tathagatas are only preachers" (Carus, p. 107, Dhammapada).

Few months before his death, he addressed Ānanda at Beluva, near Vaishali :

"On Ānanda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help.... Those who shall be lamps unto themselves, not relying upon any external help, but holding fast to the truth as their lamp, shall reach the very topmost height. But they must be anxious to learn" (Mahaparinirvana Sutranta).

On his death-bed in the *śāla* grove of the Mallas at Kuśinārā, the Buddha again discouraged blind reliance on any authority including his own. He asked his disciples whether they accepted the truth, the Dharma, because, he had explained them, or because of their own realisation : "Is it not even that which ye have yourselves known, yourselves seen, yourselves realised ?"

His last words were :

"Decay is inherent in all component things, but the truth will remain forever. Work out your salvation with diligence." (Mahaparinivana Sutranta).

Silence on Metaphysics

The Buddha did have definite views about soul, God (existence or otherwise), the absolute truth, *nirvāṇa*, origin of the universe, life after death and so on. But he rarely expressed them. Often he was reticent on such matters and even silent. He discouraged speculation on such matters on the ground, that what really helps a spiritual aspirant is self-realisation and not speculation. Therefore, his statements on metaphysics as reported by his chroniclers do not constitute an integral part of his divine massage. Yet his ambiguous stand on metaphysics led to more metaphysical speculations after his death, till the system of Indian philosophy received a satisfactory and coherent treatment, more than a thousand years later, by the great scholar-saint Shankarāchāryya. This topic shall be dealt at length in the next chapter.

Nirvāṇa through Love and Sacrifice

If the core of the Buddha's message has to be uttered in a few words, it would be represented by the concepts of love for all living creatures, and *nirvāṇa* or salvation. When he talked about sorrow and its cessation, he was referring to it in a universal and not any personal sense. As a young prince, he hardly suffered from any sorrow except that for the whole mankind. He not only gave up his royal pleasure to redeem the world's sorrow, but also overcame the *second* temptation, *viz.*, to have the personal satisfaction in *nirvāṇa* : "I shall not pass into the final *nirvāṇa*, until I spread the wonder-working truth" (Carus, p. 38).

It is his supreme loving-thought to redeem the whole world that prompted him to usher in the wonderful concept of spiritual organisation ('sangha'), five hundred years before Christ and thousand years before Mohammed and Shankarāchāryya.

After his famous sermon at Varanasi, he exhorted his first five disciples :

"A man that stands alone, having decided to obey the truth, may be weak and slip back into his old ways. Therefore, stand ye together, assist one another, and strengthen one another's efforts.

"Be like unto brothers; one in love, one in holiness, and one in your zeal for the truth.

"Spread the truth and preach the doctrine in all quarters of the world, so that in the end, all living creatures will be citizens of the kingdom of righteousness.

"Go ye now, O bhikkus, for the benefit of the many, for the welfare of mankind, out of compassion for the world. Preach the doctrine which is glorious. Proclaim to all a life of holiness. If the doctrine is not preached to those whose eyes are scarcely covered with dust, they cannot attain salvation" (Carus, pp. 46-48; Mahavarga, I, 6).

In Rajagriha, the Buddha told that just as it was difficult for any enemy to defeat the democratically united Vajjis in the north of the Ganges, so also "the brethern meeting in concord, rising in concord and attending in concord to the affairs of the Sangha may not decline but prosper" (Carus, p. 178).

The Sangha is however for *moral* victory only. "The robe of the Tathagata is sublime forbearance and patience. The abode of the Tathagata is charity and love of all beings. The pulpit of the Tathagata is the comprehension of the good law in its abstract meaning as well as in its particular application... *The preacher's sole aim must be that all beings become Buddhas*" (Carus, p. 103).

Love and compassion were the cornerstones of the Buddha's teachings, "*Akkodhena jine Kodham, asādhum sādhuna jine*—let a man overcome anger by non-anger and evil by good" (Dhammapada, 223). "Neither fire, nor moisture, nor wind can destroy the blessing of a good deed, and *blessings reform the whole world*" (Carus, p. 133).

Gautama Buddha explained in Tevijjasutta, the sublime technique for communion with the Absolute (or 'Brahma-Vihara') based upon love :

"The Tathagata knows the straight path that leads to a union with Brahmā. He lets his mind pervade the four quarters of the world with thoughts of love. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around and everywhere, will continue to be filled with love, far-reaching, grown great, and beyond measure. There is not one living creature that the Tathagata passes by or leaves aside, but regards them all with mind set free, and deep-felt love" (Carus, p. 114, Digha, I, 235). He further explained that *maitrī* or love is the first out of the four steps of Brahma-Vihara or spiritual attainment. The other three are *karuṇā* or compassion, *mudita* or sympathy and ultimately *upekshā* or equanimity or transcendence over sorrow and joy.

In his sermon at Rajagriha, he exhorted King Bimbisāra and his other disciples :

"As a mother risks her life
And watches over her child,
So boundless be your love to all,
So tender, kind and mild.
"Ye, Cherish good-will right and left,
All round, early and late,
And without hindrance, without stint,
From envy free and hate,
While standing, walking, sitting down,
Whate'er you have in mind,
The rule of life that's always best
Is to be loving-kind."

(Carus, p. 55. Maitri Sutra, Sutra Nipata, V. 148)

Was this doctrine of love a mere sermon? Far from it : the Buddha *practised* it intensely. He stopped animal sacrifices, often offering himself in lieu of the animal to be slaughtered. His compassion for the fellow human beings was supreme.

Tissa, a monk of Sravasti, was attacked by a malignant skin disease. No one would come near him. When the Buddha visited his hut, he immediately attended to his ailments, washed the sores of the patient himself and told his disciples :

"The Tathagata has come into the world to befriend the poor, to succour the unprotected, to nourish those in bodily affliction, *both the followers of the Dharma and unbelievers*, to give sight to the blind and enlighten the minds of the deluded, to stand up for the rights of orphans as well as the aged, and in so doing *to set an example to others*. This is the *consummation* of his work, and thus he attains the great goal of life as the rivers that lose themselves in the ocean" (Carus, p. 173, Chinese Dhammapada, translated by S. Beal).

It is this moving spirit which inspired the followers of the great Buddha through centuries. When the Blessed one told his followers : "Rouse the unbelievers to accept the truth and fill them with delight and joy. Quicken them, edify them, and lift them higher and higher until they see the truth face to face in all its splendour and infinite glory," the disciples responded :

> "O thou who rejoicest in kindness having its source in compassion, thou pourest out nectar, the rain of the law! We shall do what the Tathagata commands."
>
> "And this vow of the disciples resounded through the universe, and like an echo it came back from all the Bodhisattvas who are to be and will come to preach the good law of Truth to future generations" (Carus, p. 105; Saddharma Puṇḍarika).

The Buddha's supreme call for salvation through love and service (*ātmano mokshārtham jagadhitāya cha*) has found resonant echoes through the ages—from Jesus Christ to Swami Vivekananda.

3

Controversies on Buddha's Teaching and a Hindu Viewpoint

We have seen in the previous chapter that Gautama Buddha's messages to the humanity were not only inspiring but intensely practical, terse and bereft of metaphysical speculations. Yet, controversies arose about his teachings within a few centuries, and while Buddhism indeed became 'Light of Asia' and continues to illuminate the whole world, the organisation was split into sects within a century after the Buddha's death. This is indeed very strange. We shall try to explore the reasons from the point of view of a modern Hindu.

The Buddha was born in the Hindu society, went through many of its religious/spiritual traditions, accepting some and rejecting others, and his disciples came from *different* strata of Hindu society with varying *sanskāra* or conceptions of life. Thus, there were controversies in his organisation even during his lifetime. When the Buddha abandoned the path of self-mortification prior to his Enlightenment, he himself was abandoned by his five Brahmin colleagues, who later became his disciples. Devadatta was apparently influenced by Mahāvira's path of total non-violence. When the Buddha declined to accept Devadatta's suggestion for total abstention from fish and meat, the latter's 'love' for animals degenerated into hatred against his cousin brother and spiritual mentor !

The Issue of Minor Precepts

Gautama Buddha had to guide his disciples in the ethical path towards *nirvāṇa* or spiritual realisation, and therefore, many rules or 'lesser precepts' were formulated for the benefit of the monks. Often, the individualist monks resented against these rules or *vinaya.* Their ego and individualistic tendencies precipitated a near schism situation in the Ghositaram monastery in Kosambi. On hearing the news of the Buddha's death, Subhadra, an old monk in the rank of Mahakashyapa, exclaimed, "We are well rid of the great Sramana. We used to be annoyed by being told, 'this beseems you, this beseems you not'. Now we shall be able to do whatever we like.'' The Buddha's spiritual successor Mahakashyapa was naturally aghast at hearing this remark, made so soon after the tragedy, and decided to convene the First Council of the Buddhists at Rajagriha, and to set the *Dharma* (principles) and *Vinaya* (rules) of the organisation right, "before those who argue against the *Dharma* and *Vinaya* become powerful, and those who hold to them become weak" (Cullavagga XI, 1, 1-2; Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 20, 371-372).

The Second Council was held only a century later at Vaishali, since 'those who argued against rules' indeed became powerful. The errant monks of Vaishali violated ten laws—some trivial and the rest, such as accepting gold and silver from laymen, not so trivial. The controversy that arose, finally split the Buddhist organisation into two, and gradually many more by the time *Priyadarśī* Ashoka convened the Third Council at Pataliputra. When Kaniska convened the Fourth Council around 100 A.D., there were nearly eighteen Buddhist sects.

Did the Buddha foresee the danger of minor precepts acting as irritants and causing dissensions? Probably he did. He told Ānanda before his death :

"When I am gone, Ānanda, let the Sangha (organisation), if it should so wish, revoke all the *lesser* and *minor* precepts" (Mahaparinirvana Sutra VI, 3; SBE, Vol. 20, 377).

But, neither the disciple asked what the 'minor' precepts were, nor did the Teacher elaborate on the theme. Later, Ānanda apologised to the organisation, during the First Council, for not having sought the necessary clarification from the Teacher. However, it was too late, and Mahakashyapa decided to retain all the commandments of the Buddha in the holy scriptures (SBE, 20, 378).

The 'minor precepts' were indeed some bone of contention when the Vajjian monks of Vaishali favoured relaxed rules, and when these were not granted during the Second Council, decided to precipitate the first rift in the organisation. They convened a great congregation of monks and common folk (*Mahāsangiti*) and called themselves proponents of great liberalism (*Mahāsanghikas*). Certain portions of the Canon were rejected, and some texts rejected in the First (Mahakashyapa's) Council were included. In their text *Mahāvastu*, they asserted the *lokottara* (supramundane) character of the Buddha. The Buddha and the Bodhisattva (would-be Buddha) were deified. It was pointed out by them that the traditionalists—*Sthaviravādins* later called *Theravādins*—were interested in personal spiritual enlightenment only, considering the Buddha to be an ordinary saint; to them, salvation *of the world* was not a motto of the spiritual seeker. Ultimately, *Mahāsanghikas* termed their creed as *Mahāyāna*—the great vessel—and the creed of the traditionalists *Hinayāna*—the little vessel. Of course, the monks of the Theravada school resented this name-calling, and the split became irreversible (Chapter Six in '2500 Years of Buddhism', edited by P.V. Bapat).

From the Hindu point of view, it is not necessary to follow the process of divisions and sub-divisions in the Buddhist organisation which went on for centuries. It is of paramount importance, however, to consider in what respects the Buddha's teachings *appear* to differ from the basic Hindu (Vedantist) philosophy, and to argue that the 'difference' is by far and large illusory.

Gautama Buddha was born and lived in a world which was surcharged with metaphysical speculations and theological debates, but devoid of the spirit of selfless sacrifice. To instil ethical and scientific traditions in the seeker's mind, he *tried* to de-emphasize and maintain silence on the metaphysical questions. His purpose was often defeated when the questioning minds, taking advantage of the Buddha's silence, indulged in their own independent speculations on the topics raised. What is worse, the Buddha's teachings were only memorised during the First Council, and recorded in writing much later. Thus, the question of distortion of the Buddha's original teachings can never be resolved. Nevertheless, from whatever was recorded by the Buddhists, it may not be very difficult for us to prove the essential similarity between the Buddhist and the Vedantist point of view.

The Buddha—an Atheist?

The Buddha did not believe in *Iśvara* or a personal God. Nor does a Vedantist accept personal God. Human psychology demands, however, the need of symbols for spiritual concentration. Those who ridiculed Hindu 'idols', themselves deified their prophets and holy scriptures in the place of God! Thus, the Buddha's so-called non-belief in *Iśvara* is not to be taken as atheism or disbelief in the cosmic principle, which may be variously termed as the Absolute or *Brahman* or *Ṛta* or, as he preferred to call, *Dharma.* Shri Ramakrishna mentioned about the Buddha:

"*Nāstik Keno ? Nāstik noy; mukhe balte pāreni. Buddha ki jāno? Both swarupke chintā kore kore-tāi haoā—bodh swarpup haoā...Nāstik keno hote jābe! Jekhāne swarupke both hoy, sekhāne asti nāstir madhyer abasthā*" (Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita in original Bengali—conversation on 9th April, 1886; Vol. 3, 25th Section, B.S., 1355, 1st Chapter, pp. 307-310).

"Why atheist? He was not an atheist. He simply could not express his inner experiences in words. Do you know what 'Buddha' means? It is to become one with *Bodha*, Pure Intelligence, by meditating on That which is of the nature of Pure Intelligence; it is to become Pure Intelligence Itself...Why should Buddha be called an atheist? When one realizes *Swarupa*, the true nature of one's Self, one attains a state that is something between asti, *is* (existence) and nāsti, *is not* (non-existence)" (Gospel in English, Vol. 2, pp. 947-948).

This experience 'in between existence and non-existence' (*asti nāstir madhyer abasthā*) is the zone of relative experience which has been described by the proponents of 'Madhyamik' philosophy, such as Nagarjuna, as the *Śūnyatā* or the cosmic void. The unfortunate choice of the word *śūnya*—zero or nothing—created a misconception that Buddhism is atheistic, agnostic or negativistic.

The Issue of Anattā—Denial of Soul

An equally serious issue is whether the Buddha denied 'soul'. The common notion is that he did, whereas in actual sense, he did not. Let us note what he himself said:

"Self is the cause of selfishness and the source of evil; truth cleaves to no self. Seek not self, but seek the truth...Ye love self and will not abandon self-love. So be it, but then verily, ye should learn to *distinguish between the false self and the true self*. The ego with all its egotism is the false self. It is an unreal illusion and a perishable combination. He, only who identifies his self with the truth, will attain *Nirvaṇa*" (Carus, p. 3).

Thus, the Buddha clearly distinguishes between the false self—or 'ego' (that which generates selfishness) or *aham* (in Prākrit/Sanskrit terminology)—and true self—or 'soul' (essence of self) or *ātman* (the beautiful Hindu/Sanskritic word). Unfortunately, the Buddhist scriptures have put the Pali words *atta* and *anattā* in the Buddha's mouth causing considerable semantic confusion. Edward J. Thomas has aptly remarked in his book, "Life of Buddha—as Legend & History", p. 126 :

"In Buddhist terminology, it is a peculiarity to adopt the terms of its opponents and to give them a new sense."

It is therefore questionable whether the Buddha meant by *Anattā* the non-existence of *Atman* or soul or true self. If he meant by that word impermanence of ego and body or the false self, certainly it was in line with the Vedantist thought. In this context, a full discussion on the Vedic word *ātman* and its etymology or origin is necessary. The author is fully indebted to the beautiful essay by the outstanding Indologist, Dr. Paul Deussen (on *Atman* in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings, 4th Impression, 1958, Vol. II, pp. 195-197).

Etymology of 'Ātman' or Soul

Originally the word meant 'breath' (teutonic *ātum*). Four early passages in Ṛegveda accept this meaning, *i.e.*, 'breath', and use the word *tman*. The word *atman* might have originated from two pronominal stems: a (in a-haṁ or nominal 'I') and ta ('this')='this my own self' or 'the soul' which is not the same as nominal 'I'.

The meaning of the word developed in four directions : (1) the own person, the own body, opposed to the outside world, (2) the trunk of the body as opposed to the limbs, (3) the soul as opposed to the body, and (4) the *essence* as opposed to what is not essence. "The idea of the word was thus relative and negative. Such relative-negative concepts are frequent in philosophy to signify the inner principle" (Deussen).

The word *Brahman* originally meant 'prayer' in Ṛgveda. Gradually the word came to signify the 'principle of the world', and the meaning of the words *Atman* and *Brahman* merged, when 'Brahman' was equated to 'Paramātman'—the soul of the eternal principle which *contains* the soul of an individual ('ātman'). Thus, the Vedantist while denying the permanence of a separate individual unchanging soul recognises the existence of a universal soul, "a persistent immutable reality—but other than my personality, other than this composite which I call myself" (Sri Aurobindo, Complete Works, Vol. 16, p. 91). We wonder whether the original position of the Buddha was substantially different from this Vedantist viewpoint. Sri Aurobindo further points out, and quite aptly: "If Buddha really combated and denied all Vedantic conceptions of the Self, then it can be no longer true that Buddha refrained from all metaphysical speculations or distinct pronouncements as to the nature of the ultimate Reality....From the little what he said it would appear that he was aware of a 'Permanent beyond equivalent to the Vedantic Para-Brahman, but which he was quite unwilling to describe" (Vol. 22, pp. 59-60; 62).

Swami Vivekananda has also made the point that the Buddha's concept of 'non-self' or *anattā* can be better explained in terms of the Vedantic doctrine :

"Buddha's great doctrine of selflessness can be better understood if it is looked at in *our* way. In the *Upanishads*, there is already the great doctrine of the *Atman* and the *Brahman*. The *Atman*, self, is the same as *Brahman*, the Lord.... There is one Self, not many. That one Self shines in various forms. Man is man's brother because all men are one. A man is not only my brother, say the Vedas, *he is myself*. Hurting any part of the universe, I only hurt myself. I am the universe. It is a delusion that I think I am Mr. so and so" (Complete Works, 6th Edition, 1977, Vol. 8, pp. 100-101).

The Buddha could not have thought otherwise. He was not nihilistic, and never denied the real self. The Buddha used the word *Atta* to indicate both the false self (ego) as well as the true self (soul). Radhakrishnan beautifully comments :

"When Buddha argues that *nirvāṇa* can be normally attained before the bodily death of the sage, and equates it with happiness of the highest order accompanied by the consciousness of the *destruction of all rebirth*, he tacitly admits the reality of the Self. The Dhammapada makes the Self the 'Lord of the Self' and the witness of its good and evil : '*attā hi attano nātho*' (160)" (Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, p. 687).

Then again :

"When the Buddha asks us to have the Self as our light (*attadīpā*), the self as our refuge (*atta saraṇā*) (Mahaparinibbana Sutta ii, 25), surely he is referring not to the transitory constituents, but the universal spirit in us."

(On 'Dhammapada' by Radhakrishnan, pp. 45-46)

In *Samyuttanikaya* I. 75 (Udana 47), the Buddha tells Prasenjit: "Who seeks the Self (*attakāma*) will injure (*himse*) none". It is evident that the Buddha is talking about one who seeks *true Self*. Elsewhere, he condemns the evil of selfishness or egoism centred around false and illusory self.

Conclusive proof about the Buddha's high estimate of the Self is evident in Section 12 'Attavaggo' (on Atta or Self) in Dhammapada :

"Attanam che piyam jayna rakheshya tam surakkitam" (157)
"Atta hi attano natho ko hi natho paro siya ?" (160).

"If a man holds himself dear, let him diligently watch himself.... The Self is the Lord of Self; who else could be the Lord ?"

Furthermore, the concept of *Paramātman* or Great Soul, corollary to human soul was brought out implicitly in Kevaddha-Sutta of Digha. That the Buddha's doctrine was very close to Vedantic concept of Ātman has been admitted by several non-Hindu scholars of Buddhism. J.E. Jennings argues :

"Though Gautama ultimately rejected the teaching of both these ascetic thinkers (Alara Kalama and Rudraka Ramaputra), the Brahman doctrine of the Paramatman evidently remained as the basis of his doctrine of the impermanence of the individual.... On his Enlightenment, the Buddha's first feeling was that these two ascetics had so nearly attained the truth, it was to them that he should first carry the new Dhamma."

("The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha", p. lxvi)

Mrs. Rhys Davids has been more candid on this issue :

"So far as we can trace it, the earliest teaching we call Buddhist, *did not deny the very man or self* (what was denied from the very first was that man, the spirit, the *Atman*, could rightly be considered as either body or mind). To see this, *we must shed our own standpoint of the eighteenth century* in force still with us; we must imagine the power of the word *Ātman*.... Even now the Southern Buddhist in Asia and the very latest writers on Buddhism in the West fail to discern the change which spread like a very canker over Buddhism in this matter."

(Calcutta Review, November 1927; quoted by Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, pp. 711-712).

Still, a basic question persists. Alara expounded to Gautama the Vedantic theory of Ātman, and its distinction from the perishable body, illustrating in terms of '*muñja* grass when removed from the reed' (Carus, p. 26). Yet, Gautama was not convinced. What was the reason? Was there a semantic problem, a communication barrier between the two?

Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacharita* provides a clue to the above question. According to him, Gautama's reply to Alara was that the release of the knower of the field, *ātman*, from the body cannot lead to final beatitude or liberation, since the field-knower is not abandoned :

Kṣhetrajñasya aparityāgāt abaimi etat anaiṣṭhikam

(Buddhacharita, 12.69)

The liberated soul may again become bound from the continued existence of the causal conditions (12.71). As long as the soul persists, there is no abandonment of the ego-principle (12.76). In other words, perfect liberation or *Nirvāṇa* must mean full merger or complete loss of identity of an individual soul, *ātman*, in the cosmic soul or *brahman*, which is the only immutable substance. This state is identical with *nirvikalpa samādhi* as described in Shankara's neo-Vedantism and Atish Dipankar's *Bodhi-patha-pradipa* (54 & 55).

Another possible explanation is that the Buddha abhorred the word 'self' and its remotest link with the concept of selfishness (Jennings, p. lxvi). Swami Vivekananda also felt that the Buddha's emphasis was on removing the concept of selfishness, 'the great curse of the world' (Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 529).

The Questions on Identity, Transmigration and Karma

A Hindu's sense of perplexity regarding the so-called Buddhistic rejection of 'Ātman' is heightened in view of the Buddha's acceptance of the Hindu view of 'Karma'. If the Self perishes after death, and there is no transmigration of ego-entity, what is the meaning of 'Karma' or transfer of the results of action into a new life? This dilemma is easily resolved, if we realise that the Buddha did *not* categorically deny the theory of transmigration, nor did he preach *total* destruction of Self after death. Some of his statements should be closely followed:

> "There is no evidence of the existence of an immutable ego-being, a self which remains the *same* and migrates from body to body. There is rebirth but no transmigration" (Carus, pp. 27-28).
>
> "Some say that the Self endures after death, some say it perishes. *Both are wrong*".
>
> (Rajagriha Sermon, Carus, p. 54)

Evidently, the emphasis is on *change* in the ego-content which is not immutable, and not on total destruction of the true self.

This is clear from the Buddha's famous discussion on "Identity and Non-identity" which he undertook with Kūṭadanta, the Brahmin of the village Danamati :

"There is rebirth of character, but no transmigration of a self. Thy thought forms re-appear, but there is no ego-entity transferred.

"Where is thy self? Thy self to which thou cleavest is undergoing a constant change. The questioner is no longer the same person as he, who a minute after receives the answer. Years ago, thou wast a small babe. It there any identity of the babe and the man? There *is an identity* in a certain sense only. Indeed there is more identity between the flames of the first and the third watch, even though the lamp might have been extinguished during the second watch. Now which is thy *true self,* that of yesterday, or that of to-day, or that of tomorrow, for the preservation of which thou clamourest ?"

(Carus, pp. 122-126)

To Kutadanta, the concept of flux or evanescence was understandable; but he was startled by the Buddha's phrase that there is no transmigration of self, though there is rebirth of character: "the stanza uttered by a teacher is re-born in the scholar who repeats the words." (Carus, p. 122).

He shot the famous comment: "This is not a fair retribution. I cannot recognize the justice that others after me will reap what I am sowing now."

The Blessed one waited a moment and then replied :

"Is all teaching in vain ? *Dost thou not understand that those others are thou thyself? Thou thyself wilt reap what thou sowest, not others.*" (Carus, p. 127).

The Buddha had to defend the theory of Karma, which he always supported most vigorously, and therefore could not absolutely rule out identity of Self through the cycle of Karma.

Yet, Nagasena was persistent in Milindapañha (Kutadanta's episode was fully quoted in this text ('The Questions of King Milinda', T.W. Rhys Davids, SBE, Volume 35), five centuries after the Buddha, and denied transmigration of soul while accepting transference of Karma (*collective* effect of action).

J.E. Jennings aptly comments :

"The explanation (Nagasena's) however plainly leaves the matter a mystery.... The doctrine that the effects of an individual's action pass at his death to a new (?) individual, places plainly arbitrary and illogical limitations upon those effects.... This was as obvious in the time of Gautama as at the present day.... In the end, the ancient Indian doctrine of Rebirth overcame its rival". (Vedantic Buddhism, p. xliv).

The Buddha's statement, "Thou thyself will reap what thou sowest, not others," seems to be the last word on the subject. It is amusing that the Buddhists went on pitting themselves against the theory of *Ātman* and transmigration of soul, while accepting the doctrine of Bodhisattva perfecting his knowledge through a chain of rebirths !

Samkharuppatti-sutta in Majjhima Nikaya refers to the rebirth of the elements of an individual according to the way he directs his mind. Jataka tales, depicted in the Bharhut and Sanchi stupas, built (3rd century B.C.) centuries before Nagarjuna, fully accept the theory of re-birth. In the next chapter, we shall point out that some of the Jataka tales are as old as the earliest canons of Buddhism. Thus, the theory that the Buddha denied *Ātman* or true self and transmigration of soul is not acceptable—in an unqualified sense.

Yet, Swami Vivekananda would 'often sit and ponder about the Buddhist claim that *another* soul inherits what we have amassed for it'. "Was not the whole notion of continuous identity illusory, to give way, at the last, to the final perception that the *many* were all unreal, and the *One* alone Real ? "Yes", he exclaimed one day, after long thought in silence, "Buddhism must be right! Reincarnation is only a mirage! *But this vision is to be reached, by the path of Advaita alone*".

(Sister Nivedita, The Master as I Saw Him, pp. 268-270).

Swami Vivekananda reached the same conclusion on this issue as the Buddha, but significantly traced this thought to Vedanta or the theory of Advaita :

> "There can be no reason for doing good to people, if not they, but others, are to gather fruit of their efforts.... Don't you see that there is but one reply ... the theory of Advaita? *For we are all one* !"
>
> (*ibid.*, pp. 271-272)

The Buddha's 'Silence' on the Ultimate Reality

The Buddha was *not absolutely 'silent'* on the issues of *Ātman, Brahman* or the ultimate reality. He was merely *reticent* to indulge in what he called unnecessary metaphysical speculations. Fortunately for us, however, he did make positive statements on unchangeable ultimate reality, and thus, we can easily rebut the claims—often made by his own followers—that he was an agnostic and a preacher of nothingness ('*śūnyatā*').

The Buddha himself adduced reasons for his silence or reticence to speak on metaphysical problems. He told Ānanda why he declined to give a categorical answer to the question of *Ātman* raised by Vacchagotta. If he gave an affirmative answer, one might construe that he was favouring *śāśwatavāda*, permanence of immutable soul (meaning ego-entity and not Brahman), and a negative answer would confirm the theory of *ucchedavāda* or the doctrine of annihilation. He clearly supported the *continuity* of *changing* ego-entity in the cycle of Karma. Yet, Oldenberg remarked, that Buddha avoided negation "in order not to shock a weak-minded hearer". Radhakrishnan hotly repudiated Oldenberg's erroneous conclusion : "We cannot agree with this view that Buddha deliberately disguised the truth. Were Oldenberg correct, then *nirvāṇa* would mean annihilation, which Buddha repudiates".

(Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, p. 386).

Nagarjuna had earlier said in his commentary on Prajñāpāramita-Sutra : "The Tathagata *sometimes taught that the Ātman exists*, and at other times he taught that the *Ātman* does not exist .. which of these two views represents the Truth ? It is doubtless the doctrine of the denial of Ātman". What was denied by the Buddha is the permanence of ego-entity (*ahaṁ* or false self) and not the *Ātman* or true self. Radhakrishnan rightly comments : "When we pass from the direct teaching of Buddha to its interpretation of Nagasena and Buddhaghosa, a negative complexion is cast over the silence or the agnosticism of the original teaching of Buddha" (Vol. I, pp. 389-390).

It is the reliance on such later-day interpreters like Nagasena, that made European savants like Oldenberg and Keith to commit grievous errors of judgement. Professor A. Berriedale Keith wrongly held the Buddha to be a 'genuine agnostic', having no reasoned or other conviction on the matter of ultimate nature of existence, even after recognising that a positive philosophy on the ultimate reality is traceable in the Buddhist Cannon ! (Buddhist Philosophy, 1923, pp. 45, 63-64.)

Fortunately, following the footsteps of Mrs. Rhys Davids, the young Western scholars on Buddhism are coming round to the view that nowhere in the original gospel of the Buddha, the 'self' is absolutely or explicitly denied. Joaquin Pérez-Remon has pointed out (in his book, 'Self and Non-self in Early Buddhism', The Hague, 1980) that there are many passages in the earlier parts of the Pali canon, that express themselves as if *Atta* were a reality, not discussed, but taken for granted in the most natural way (pp. 1-2 and 303-304). Thus, *Anattā* does not mean 'no soul'; it means 'what is not soul' (p. 304).

Pérez-Remon has further pointed out (p. 226) the frequent occurrence of two words in the original Pali canon : *asmimāna*, the conceit of 'I am' or ego, and *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* (*āsakti-driṣti* ?), attachment to ego or 'what is not self'. A *bhikku* 'becomes an Aryan if this conceit is abandoned, destroyed to the very root, unable to sprout again' (Anguttara Nikaya, 2.346-347). Thus, the emphasis is on knowing what is not self, so that in this process of negation, *netivāda*, one may discover the true self, the existence of which is tacitly assumed.

While staying at Kosambi in the Simsapa grove, the Buddha explained that just as there were many more leaves in the trees than in his hands, similarly, "there is much more (truth), which I have learned and have not told you, than that which I have told you. The things, *which knowingly I have not announced* to you, are more because these are not connected with the essentials, of the holy life".

(Simsapa Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya, 5. 437)

Is this a doctrine of nothingness or agnosticism ? He dissuaded his disciples to indulge in metaphysical discussions, because other (metaphysical) truths, which the Buddha had realised, "bring no profit, do not conduce to progress in holiness, to *nirvāṇa*". When Malunkyaputta went on pressing for answers to his metaphysical queries, the Buddha shot a counter-question :

"Does a man, hit by poisoned arrow, refuse to be treated by the doctor unless he knows who shot the arrow ?"

(Majjhima, 63)*

The clearest statement by the Buddha against annihilation (*uccheda*) theory is to be found in the Udana :

"There *is* a sphere, where there is neither earth, nor water, *nor nothingness*, nor perception, nor absence of perception, neither this world nor that world ..." which reminds us of the Advaita reality uttered in Kenopanishad and later echoed by Shankaracharyya when he was branded as a crypto-Buddhist.

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*Shri Ramakrishna has given a similar message : having entered the mango-grove, better eat sweet mangoes rather than counting them! This is not agnosticism but a positive realism.

The Buddha says more clearly :

"There *is an* unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded; if there were not, there would be no escape from the born, the become, the made, and the compounded."

(Udana, 8. 1-4)

While Swami Abhedananda echoes the doubt of every Hindu admirer of the Buddha :

"It should be investigated whether Buddha himself propagated the theory of nothingness, or it evolved after his demise ..." (Complete Works, Vol. 7, pp. 232-233), almost the last words on the subject have been uttered by a renowned non-Hindu scholar on Buddhism :

"It is now clear that there is no passage (in the Buddhist canon) which asserts what is called a negative view, and it is certain that the doctrine of annihilation, a person does not exist after death, is rejected" (Edward J. Thomas, Life of Buddha, p. 191).

The Buddha's ablest disciple Sariputra, who himself obtained supreme enlightenment during the life of his teacher, dismissed Yamaka's view of *nirvāṇā* as the night of nothingness, as a heresy (Samyutta Nikaya, 3.109). Sariputra also refuted Yamaka's view that the Tathagata shall not exist after his death. The nun Khema told king Prasenjit that 'freed from the designation of body, a Tathagata is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable as the ocean'.

On Faith

The Buddha's reticence to be categorical about his experience of the absolute reality was connected with his disdain for blind faith. He did not want his disciples to merely believe in some authority such as the Vedas or even his own words. Belief based on *śaddhā* or *śraddhā* (respect for an authority) *alone* is as liable to be erroneous as right (Majjhima Nikaya, 2.218, 234; Anguttara Nikaya, 1.189).

The Buddha however distinguished blind faith from faith based upon experience (*dassana-mūlikā śaddhā*) (Majjhima Nikaya, 1.320). *Śaddhā* is considered essential if it means heartfelt enthusiasm and not merely a passive belief on authority (Samyutta Nikaya, 1.25, 38, 214; 4.70). This emphasis on the superiority of spiritual experimentation and logic or reason over blind faith is fully Vedantic in approach.

The Buddha's World-View and the Upanishad

Some of the followers of Buddhism have wanted the rest of the world to believe that the message of the Buddha did not have its roots in Hinduism. Nothing could be farther from the truth.* Ananda Coomaraswamy has brilliantly pointed out:

"The more superficially one studies Buddhism, the more it seems to differ from the Brahmanism in which it originated; the more profound our study, the more difficult it becomes to distinguish Buddhism from Brahmanism" ('Hinduism and Buddhism',** p. 45).

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*The Buddha borrowed several concepts from the Upanishadic texts, recited to him by his teachers. The word *Yogakkhema* (Dhammapada, 23) meaning *Nirvāṇa* occurs earlier in Kaṭha Upanishad (1.2.2). He distinguishes body (munja grass) from mind (the reed or *iṣikā*) : *añño muñjo, aññā isikā* (Digha, 1.77) in Kaṭha U. (2.3.17) style. The Buddha admits that he heard the phrase *Khurassa sādhunisitassa dhāram*—'well-sharpened edge of a razor' (Kaṭha U. 1.3.14) from Uddaka, the son of Rama—'*Rāmaputto ebaṁ bācham bhāsati*' (Digha, 3.127).

Yet, V.P. Varma deplores in his book, 'Early Buddhism and its Origins' (Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1973, p. 155), the 'Vedantification of Buddhism as attempted by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan' !

**This is a masterpiece which establishes beyond any doubt that Hinduism and Buddhism are not contradictory.

The Buddha himself admitted that the Dharma which he had discovered by an effort of self-culture is the ancient Aryan path (*āriamāgga*). He discovered and made known the four truths of the Brahmins (Anguttara, 4, 185; Samyutta 2, 106; 4, 117; 22, 90). He is said to be a knower of the Veda (Vedajna or of the Vedanta (*Vedāntajña*) (Samyutta, 1. 168; Sutta Nipata, 463).

Both Buddhism and the Upanishads challenge the theory of animal sacrifices and ritualistic extravagances in the Vedas (vide Muṇḍaka Upanishad, 1.2.7-12; Gita 2.42-43, etc.). Both emphasize the role of moral character, ethics and the search for Ṛta, Dharma or Truth in realising the ultimate reality and escaping from the cycle of rebirth. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad (5.2.3) emphasizes the need of celibacy, charity and compassion in the spiritual life : '*damaṁ dānaṁ dayāṁ iti*'. Muṇḍaka Upanishad proclaims (3.1.6) that truth alone wins, and not untruth – by truth is maintained the spiritual path: '*satyameba jayati nānṛtam satyena panthā bitato devajānaḥ*'.

The Buddhistic descriptions of *Śūnya* or the absolute, as 'neither void nor not void' remind us of *Nirguna Brahman* in the Upanishads ('sa eṣa neti neti ātmā'—Bṛhadāraṇyaka, 4.5.15). The Upanishads also give the apparently negative description of the Absolute:

"Where the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind..." (Kena Upanishad, 1. 3). The law of righteousness is accepted as the ultimate: "*Dharmāt param nāsti.*"

Radhakrishnan observes :

"The term *nirvāṇa* occurs in the Upanishads, and it means the blowing out of all passions, reunion with supreme spirit (*brahmanirvāṇa*). The Buddha also uses the (Upanishadic) words: *brahmaprāpti*, *brahmabhuta*, for the highest state" (on 'Dhammapada', p. 47).

"The Buddha is quite categorical like the Upanishads on the identity of the Self. His statement. *attā hi attano nātho, attā hi* *attano gati* (Dhammapada, 160 & 380), *i.e.*, 'the Self is the Lord of the Self, and its goal' is strongly reminiscent of the Upanishadic texts of earlier origin: 'all things are dear only for the sake of the Self' (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad, BU 2.4.5), 'Self alone is truly dear' (BU, 1.4.8), etc. Upanishad establishes perfect identity between an individual soul and the Absolute (BU, 2.4.12-14 and 4.5.12-15).*

Sri Ramakrishna used to assert ('The Great Master' by Swami Saradananda, Volume 1, p. 340) that 'there is no difference between the faith founded by the Buddha and the Vedic path of knowledge.'

Swami Vivekananda also described Buddhism as the true successor of Vedantism and an opponent to the rigours of caste and priesthood: 'Every one of Buddha's teachings is founded in the Vedantas. He was one of the monks who wanted to bring out the truths hidden in those books and in the forest monasteries' (Complete Works, Volume 2, p. 509).

Some Criticisms of the Buddha's Message

Three important criticisms have been made with regard to the Buddha's message: (1) his disdain for metaphysics, (2) elimination of the concept of personal God, and (3) overemphasis on celibacy and monkhood. The criticisms are not fully justified, because in each case, the Buddha had fully defended his position.

On the first issue, Radhakrishnan opines:

"The Buddha's distate for metaphysics prevented him from seeing that the partial truth (he had propagated) had a necessary complement (metaphysics)....His dogmatic denunciation of the futility of extra-empirical inquiries did not gain its end. The history of Buddhism points to the inevitability of metaphysics. It is a living proof of the truth that we fight against metaphysics only to fall into it.

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*The Buddha was however uncompromising on the essential principles, and wanted to end the co-existence of the Vedanta with the Vedic polytheism and ritualism. Shankaracharyya also tried this exercise, though half-heartedly, and 'gave us a logical theism which does not slignt the intellect'.

"There is not always a virtue in vagueness, for the indefiniteness of Buddha's metaphysics enabled his disciples to fasten different systems on to what he said. His cautions and careful attitude developed into negative system, and his teaching fell a prey to the very dogmatism which he was anxious to avoid" (Indian Philosophy, Volume 1, pp. 468-470).

We do not accept this criticism even though the fact that 'we fight against metaphysics only to fall into it' is too glaring to be denied. What could the Buddha do: indulge in more metaphysical discourses and deflect his followers from the golden path of spiritual search without any preconceived notion ? He described his doctrine as one of 'come and see', and not based on any hearsay (Samyutta Nikaya, iii). Misinterpretation of his reticence on metaphysical questions by his later-day followers is to be regretted. But could he, in his lifetime, fully subscribe to the then 'Vedic' metaphysics which was a funny conglomerate of Vedantism and non-Vedantic polytheism and ritualism? By the time our Hindu world produced a Shankaracharyya, the damage had been done not simply to the cause of Buddhism but also to the greater body of Indian philosophy, through non-appreciation of the Buddha's essentially Vedantic view.

Though the Buddha was uncompromising on the need of self-reliance and celibacy in spiritual pursuit, he never ridiculed those who would pray for supernatural help or remain dutiful householders. In Tevijjasutta he explained that acquiring the spiritual qualities of Brahman is the real essence of 'the prayer to the god Brahma'. In Kapilavastu, he promised that he would never accept a person as a monk in his Order, unless he received full consent of his parents. Most reluctantly, he opened the door of his organisation for nuns. While it served to satisfy the spiritual thirst of women, the dangers inherent in such a step was fully appreciated and predicted by himself. The charge that he admitted people as monks and nuns *indiscriminately* is most absurd. When his step-mother wanted to be the first nun in his Order, her entreaties were rejected thrice before final consent was given.

In declaring Advaita (non-dualism) as superior to the concept of personal God, organising the spiritual associations of monks, and conceiving the same for nuns, Shankaracharyya and recently Swami Vivekananda have followed in the footsteps of the Buddha. The Christ also might have been indebted to the Buddha's concept of celibacy and spiritual organisations. The originality of the Buddha lay in seizing the beautiful Vedantic concept of self-realisation, removing the trace of selfishness inherent in the idea of 'personal nirvana', and subliming it to a doctrine of 'self-forgetful loving activity' dedicated to the whole world of living creatures. Even Radhakrishnan, who made the three criticisms, finally conceded that the exaggerations were understandable, since "the *three* great enemies with which spiritual life had to contend in the Buddha's time were the theologians, the ritualists, and the worldlings".

The Mahayana-Hinayana Questions*

The Third Buddhist Council held under the patronage of Emperor Ashoka was presided over by Tissa Moggaliputta who belonged to *Vibājjavāda* (the religion of analytical reasoning) group of the Theravadins. Under his inspiration, Mahindra and Sanghamitrā, son and daughter of Ashoka, went to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and achieved missionary success. The doctrine spread to many parts of Asia, Africa and Europe. The Third Council however witnessed expulsion of sixty thousand members of *Sarvāstivada* school (those who believed in the

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*It is essential for us to discuss the *history* of the emergence of the Mahayana cult briefly, before we dwell on the Mahayana-Hinayana *controversy*.

doctrine of eternal soul and were said to 'violate' the 'original' doctrine of the Buddha).

The *Sarvāstivada* school however flourished mostly in the North, and was held in high esteem in the areas such as Mathura, Kashmir and Takshila. This group arranged a separate Council (Fourth) under the auspices of the Saka King Kanishka (~100 A.D.), while according to the Theravadins, the Fourth Council was held in Ceylon during the reign of King Vattagamani Abhaya (101-77 B.C.). Therefore, the schools came to be known as Northern and Southern Buddhists.

The *Sarvāstivadins* believed in the Buddha's statement : '*Sabbham atthi*', 'everything exists after death' (Samyutta-nikaya, S. 4, 15 and M, 1. 3) literally, and thus moved towards the positivistic Hindu view. They also accepted during the Fourth (Northern) Council, Sanskrit instead of Pali as the language for communication. In the meantime, the *Mahā-Sanghikas*, who had caused the first schism in the organisation at Vaishali, established their *lokottara* concept : supramundane/transcendental character of the Buddha and Bodhisattva, the saviour, who is infinitely superior to an ordinary saint: *Arhat* or *Pratyekbuddha*. Very soon, the *Sarvāstivādins* and the *Lokottaravādins* (Mahā Sanghikas) revolted against the dominance of the Theravadin Arhats who, they maintained, were as fallible as lay Buddhists.

While the *Mahāsanghikas* and *Sarvāstivādins* formed the core of *Mahāyānā* movement, the actual movement crystallised only during Nagarjuna's time (2nd century A D.), the founder of *Mādhyamika* school and propounder of the *Śūnyāvada* concept. Another branch of the Mahayana movement came to be known as the *Yogāchāra* school, whose followers believed in Yoga meditation. Maitreya (3rd century), Asanga and Vasubandhu (4th century), Dharmapala (7th century A.D) were some of the stalwarts belonging to this school. It may be mentioned that Shankaracharyya recognised four schools of Buddhist philosophy: *Mādhyamika*, *Yogāchāra*, *Sutrāntika* and

Vaibhāshika. The third school represented Sarvastivādi belief, admitting cognition and existence of the external world. The fourth group, also a branch of Sarvastivāda school, considered *Śūnyatā* as '*Viruddhabhāṣa*' or absurdity in language; they claimed themselves to be *pratyakshavādins* or realists.

Mahavastu and *Lalitavistara* written in mixed Sanskrit are recognised as the principal texts of the *Lokottaravādins* of the *Mahasanghikas* and the *Sarvastivādins* respectively. The earliest texts propounding the *Mahāyanā* doctrine are the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* and the *Saddharma-puṇḍarika.*

The *Saddharma-puṇḍarika* (1st century A.D.) uniquely represents the formal departure from the Theravada school (nicknamed as *Hinayāna* or the inferior vessel) and establishment of Mahāyanā Buddhism. A large part of the book is devoted to argue that Hinayana Buddhism was preached by the Buddha 'for the benefit of people of lower intelligence and modest aims'. Arhat or Saints were advised to follow the higher ('mahā') aim of attaining Buddhahood, prescribed for the Bodhisattvas, and sacrifice the merits of their spiritual attainments for the whole world. The text also goes on to state that the Buddha was not a mere Arhat : his life *is* unlimited and did not end at the death of his body. He is deified : 'anyone uttering the name of *Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva* would be saved from ship-wreck, fire or moral impurity'.

It is evident that neither the Hinayana nor the Mahayana movement could exclusively represent the *totality* of the Buddha's teaching. Radhakrishnan has ably indicated how deviations from the original teachings of the Buddha arose in both the schools of thought :

"We cannot help feeling that the ideal of the arhat, the perfect egoist, who is useless to others, is untrue to the real personality of the Buddha, the man of pity and compassion, though the dependence on the saviour Buddha of the Mahayana faith is also untrue to the teaching of the original Buddha, however useful it may be" (Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, p. 586).

The decline of Hinayana in India was connected with the decline of the Pali language and ascendancy of the Sanskrit. Ever since Panini reformed Sanskrit, Mahasanghikas, Sarvastivādins and Mahayanis took up Sanskrit as their medium of writing, and started communing with the Hindu doctrines written in Sanskrit. The Vedanta and the Gita must have influenced them.

(R. Kimura, Hinayana and Mahayana, p. 43)

The Vasudeva-Bhakti cult amongst the Hindus found its echo in the Mahayana *devotion* to Lord Buddha. In both the cases, offering the merit of spiritual practices to the Lord through service to living creatures was strongly emphasized.

On the other hand, the Theravadins (Hinayana followers) refused to learn from the Hindu Sanskrit texts or to accept the cult of Bhakti. Nevertheless, their faith in the 'original' precepts of Buddhism remained unshaken for centuries. Nagasena compiled the famous Milinda-panha or 'Questions of King Milinda'. While the Pali texts of the original Buddhist canon almost disappeared from India, the famous Buddhaghosa (4th century A.D.) went to Ceylon and translated the entire canon from Ceylonese to Pali. In the early part of the fifth century, Fa-Hien found two monasteries at Pataliputra—one 'very grand and beautiful' Mahayanist, the other Hinayanist. Yuan Chwang (in India : 629-645 A.D.) mentioned two outstanding educational establishments in India of his time : the Mahāyanist School at Nalanda where many philosophies and sciences *including the Vedas* and medical science used to be taught, and the Hinayanist School at Valabhi in Gujarat (near Bhabanagar). I-tsing reported existence of Hinayana as well as Mahayana monasteries in the Indonesian islands during the seventh century. When Dipankara Srijñāna (983-1053 A.D.), also known as Atiśa, left Headship of the University of Vikramasila in 1038 A.D. and started a reformist movement of Buddhism in Tibet, he incorporated in his Yogachara traditions (founded by Maitreya and Asanga) certain Hinayana concepts. He enforced celibacy upon the monks and discouraged magic practices to counter the later-day degeneration of the Mahayana cult.*

Thus, it would be untrue to say that Mahayana movement was able to eliminate the Theravada doctrine by mere name-calling ('Hinayana'). It is unfortunate that the concepts of personal salvation ('*atmanomokshārtham*') and selfless service to the mankind (*jagadhitāya*), which are evidently complementary, were unnecessarily pitted against each other, as if Mahayana did not appreciate the first and the Hinayana the second principle. The Buddha clearly stated in Dhammapada : *attadatham paratthena bahunapina hapaye....* "Let no one neglect his own task for the sake of another's, however great...." (attavaggo, 166). Only upon the basis of self-purification and spiritual enlightenment, selfless service to the world is to be contemplated. Recently, H.B. Aronson has established that there was enough 'Love and Sympathy in Theravada Buddhism' in his book bearing the same title (published by Motilal Banarasidas, 1980).

Nearly a thousand years after Atisa Dipankara tried to synthesise Hinayana and Mahayana—these were opposite sides of the same coin—and the Hindu religious revivalism and Muslim invasion drove away both the schools of thought from he sub-continent, the debate re-emerged mainly due to European scholars.** Oldenberg, Fausböll, Rhys Davids and other Pali scholars felt that Mahayana was an 'unfortunate deviation' from the original Theravada doctrine. J.E. Jennings felt that Paul Carus's work, 'The Gospel of the Buddha', highly acclaimed all over the world, 'would have been more useful, if it had been limited to Hinayana texts'!

(Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha, p. xxxiv)

Even Shri Aurobindo seemed to prefer the Theravada interpretation of the Buddha's doctrine :

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*In his 'Bodhi-patha-pradipa' (Cantos 28, 34, 42 & 44), Atisa put equal stress on personal Enlightenment and selfless efforts to emancipate the human society.

**Until a century ago, even the words such as Pali, Hinayana and Mahayana were little known outside Ceylon, Burma and Japan!

"As to Buddha's attitude towards life, I do not quite see how 'service to mankind' or any ideal of improvement of the world existence can have been part of his aim, since to pass out of life into a transcendence was his object".

(Complete Works, Vol. 22, p. 60)

On the other hand, Max Müller felt that Vedanta was the origin of Buddhism, and therefore felt more attracted to the Madhyamika philosophy and Mahayana cult. Mrs. Rhys Davids admitted that Pali scholars of the nineteeenth century had overstated the Theravada or Hinayana case. They forgot that even the Pali texts were *written* a couple of centuries after the Buddha's death, and the Mahayana ideas, though recorded five centuries later, were inherent in the Buddha's teachings.

E.J. Thomas must be congratulated for having put the Pali-Theravada/Sanskrit-Mahayana issue in very good perspective :

"There has been a tendency in Germany and U.K. to depend almost entirely on Pali sources, neglecting the works of schools preserved in Sanskrit.... Mahayana doctrines are doubtless older than the works in which we find them expounded".

(The Life of Buddha, 1927, pp. v-vi)

In the light of Thomas's statement, we can appreciate the earlier observations made by Swami Vivekananda :

"There are references in Buddhistic literature to Vedanta, and the Mahayana School of Buddhism is even Advaitistic.... I hold the Mahayana to be the *older* of the two schools of Buddhism.... A total revolution has occurred in my mind about the relation of Buddhism and neo-Hinduism. I may not live to work out the glimpses (he died within five months), but I shall leave the lines of work indicated, and you will have to work it out" (letter dt. 9.2.1902; Complete Works, Vol. 5, pp. 172-173).

Swami Vivekananda probably alluded to the fact that Mahayana ideas restored the positive and human aspects of

Vedantism in the Buddha's original teaching, when he held Mahayana 'to be the older of the two schools'. Theravada had drifted away from the Vedantic roots of Buddhism; thus, Mahayana was home-coming. Gaudapada and Shankaracharyya fully incorporated the Buddhist illusion theory in their neo-Vedantism (*māyāvāda*).

What endeared the Mahayana movement even more to the Hindus was its tacit acceptance of the Bhakti cult. Prayer to the transcendental consciousness was accepted as one of the routes for salvation, even though this was not recommended by the Buddha himself. The Mahayana poet tried his best to justify this path of devotion (an old concept in Hinduism and a new one in Buddhism), by ingeniously making the Buddha say :

"The repetition of the name Amitabha Buddha is meritorious *only if* thou speak it with such a devout mind as will cleanse thy heart and attune thy will to do works of righteousness" (Carus, p. 137).

The poet Śāntideva (early eighth century A.D.), inspired by this spirit of devotion, wrote his beautiful work 'Bodhicāryāvatara' or 'Introduction to the Way of Enlightenment'. In this work, he invoked all creatures to emulate Bodhisattva and become Bodhisattva themselves. He prayed :

"May all regions be filled with Buddhas and Buddha-sons.... As long as the existence of space and as long as the existence of the world, that long let my existence be devoted to the world's sorrows" (Bodhicaryāvatara, 10. 34, 55). In the Mahayana terminology, *Anattā* came to be equated to not only evanescence of this unhappy world but also selflessness of a true spiritual seeker. According to Santideva, sacrificing ourselves for our neighbour, purges the mind of error (*moha*) better than selfish meditation pursued for its own sake.

Shankaracharyya, the great Hindu Vedantist, must have been inspired by the Mahayana followers of the Buddha, and through him, the Hindus finally accepted the Buddha as one of the great saviours of the world.

In the *Daśāvatāra-stotra*, he appeals to the Buddha to enlighten his mind :

"Sa Buddha prabuddhostu macchittavarti"

That the Supreme Spirit manifests itself as incarnations in human form (*Avatāra*) is an original Hindu belief. The Hindus must have accepted the Buddha as one of the *Avatāras* even before the time of Gaudapada, Shankaracharyya's predecessor, as can be surmised from Gaudapada's homages. Later, the poet Jayadeva clearly puts the Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu or Keshava :

"Keśava dhrita Buddha śarīra
Jaya Jagadisha Hare"

We end this chapter by quoting Radhakrishnan, and then suggesting a slight modification to his viewpoint :

> "When the Brahmanical faith inculcated universal love and devotion to the God and proclaimed Buddha to be an *avatār* of Vishnu, the death-knell of Buddhism in India was sounded".
>
> (Indian Philosophy, Volume I, p. 607)

It was the wedding bell and not the 'death-knell'—announcing absorption of Buddhism in the greater framework of Hinduism How could the message of the '*Avatār* of Vishnu' be extinguished in India? After Shankaracharyya, Swami Vivekananda reminded us of the great enlightened soul, who, in the words of Prof. Rhys Davids, was "born and brought up and lived and died a Hindu".

4

The Human Buddha : Bodhisattva Anecdotes

I

When Gautama obtained the supreme Enlightenment about the creation and purpose of life which he called *ṛta* or *dharma*, he became the Buddha; at that time, he also achieved recollection of his previous births (*purvanivāsa jñāna*) and omniscient vision for the future (*divyachakshu*). Asvaghosa, the famous biographer of the Buddha, described :

> "After Enlightenment, he called to mind in the first watch, the succession of his previous births. He recalled thousands of births, that he had been so and so in such and such a place, and that passing out of that life he had come hither."
>
> (Buddhacharita, 14.2 & 3)

The Buddha recalled that he had passed through the vicissitudes of many lives as 'Bodhisattva' (Buddha-designate) aspiring to be an enlightened person (the Buddha) some day. He had a vision that he was preceded and would be followed by many more Buddhas. During his illustrious career as a spiritual teacher, he would later frequently recall his previous birth (Jataka or Bodhisattva) experiences, and these anecdotes constituted a very significant portion of the original Buddhist canon. At a later stage, the Mahayana doctrine, based upon the premise that the Buddha was not a mere saint but was virtually the redeemer of the world, raised Bodhisattva concept to that of Godhood, a redeemer (Avalokiteśvara). This fact led some Pali scholars of the nineteenth century to doubt the authenticity of the Bodhisattva anecdotes. The view that Buddhaghosha himself had re-written *Jatakartha varnana* in Pali with Mahayanist colour has been proved to be far-fetched (Coomaraswamy, p. 291). It would be quite in order at this stage to briefly comment on the place of Jataka stories in the Buddhist canon.

The Pali canon consists of three *Piṭakas* or Baskets (*Tripiṭakas*) : *Vinaya* (rules of the order), *Sutta* (gospels) and *Abhidamma* (theology). While *Vinaya Pitaka* includes *Mahavarga*, some of the oldest parts of the Buddha legend, the first two sermons at Varanasi and Gaya, and *Chullavarga* with stories of Anathapindada, Devadatta, etc., the *Sutta Pitaka* is by far the most important of the three Pitakas.

The *Sutta Pitaka* is divided into five sections or Nikayas : *Digha*, *Majjhima*, *Samyutta*, *Anguttara* and *Khuddaka*. The Buddhist doctrines and rival philosophical thoughts are properly elaborated in *Digha* and *Anguttara Nikaya*. *Majjhima* has 152 sermons and dialogues on religious and social themes such as on caste, etc. *Khuddaka Nikaya* has many (15) literary gems such as *Dhammapada*, *Theragatha*, *Therigatha* and *Jātakārthavarṇanā*.

Jātakārthavarnaṇā, abbreviated as 'Jātaka', holds great significance for the literary and social history of the ancient India, few centuries before and after Lord Buddha. A total of 547 stories claimed to be narrated by the Buddha have been recorded in the Jataka. All these describe the previous birth stories of Bodhisattva or the Buddha-designate in some form or other. The Bodhisattva doctrine, *viz.*, the belief that a Buddha-designate passes through humble births and noble deeds, improving his character before attaining the final birth of Buddhahood or enlightenment, is manifest in each of the stories. Each Jataka narrative has three parts : (a) *pratyutpannavastu* or the ('present') context in which the Buddha tells the story, (b) *atītavastu*, the story itself of the past, when Bodhisattva was one of the characters in the episode, and (c) *samābadhān*, the identification of the characters in the earlier story, *atītavastu*, with the Buddha and his associates.

There is no reason to believe that the Jataka stories written in Hinayana or Theravada Pali canons were fabrications of Mahayana writers who came much later to write in Sanskrit. It is true that the Jataka books grew up gradually, having no single author, but this was because canons were recorded from memorised and orally transmitted (through generations) versions over a very long period. The gists of the stories as verses, used to be kept alive in memory through recitations, even in the earliest congregations.

As Rhys Davids pointed out (Buddhist India, Chap. XI), the earliest canons contained the kernel of the later-day book *Jatakarthavarnana*. A Digha Nikaya Sutta, *viz.*, *Mahapadana Sutta*, records the Buddha's description about the earlier Buddhas, and his transition from Bodhisattvahood to Gautama Buddha through successive births. This material was used in *Buddhavamsa*, *Khuddaka Nikaya*, and in the introduction to Jataka as *Jataka Nidan*. *Kutadanta Sutta* in Digha 1. 127 records the Buddha telling the Brahman Kutadanta how he (the Buddha), in a previous birth, had advised a king to abolish animal sacrifice. The famous *Mahasudarsana Sutta* in Digha contains the Buddha's own narration, while he was at his death-bed, to his disciple Ānanda about his earlier existence as King Sudarsana. It is only on this basis that Jataka No. 95 Maha-sudarsana Jataka was written at a later date. Similarly, the Buddha had identified himself with the hero in the Makha-deva Jataka (no. 9), as recorded earlier in Majjhima Nikaya, 2.75. The Buddha's previous existence as Jotipala (Jataka, 423 & 522) was mentioned by himself to his disciple Ānanda (vide Ghatikara Sutta in Raja Vagga, Majjhima Nikaya). Similarly, brief references to Jataka stories 1, 10, 37, 91, 203, 253, 405 are found in verse forms in the earliest canons such as Digha Nikaya, etc. As a matter of fact, there are many other previous birth stories recorded in the *older* documents as Buddha's own statements, which were not included in *Jatakarthavarnana* (Rhys Davids, Buddhist India, Chap. XI). Thus, *it is not possible to reject the Jataka anecdotes while accepting the genuinity of the earliest canons.** It may further be noted that more than two dozens of bas-reliefs of the period third century B.C. (at Bharhut, Sanchi, etc.)—long before Mahayana movement became popular—have been identified as depicting Jataka stories, a few popular instances being Makha Deva (9), Maha Kapi (407), Dasaratha (461), Canda Kinnara (485), Vessantara or Vishwantara (547), etc.

Out of 547 Jataka stories, Bodhisattva is reported to have been born as a King 85 times, as a Rishi 83 times, Acharyya (26), Amātya (24), Brahmin (24), Prince (24), landowner (23), scholar (22) and merchant 13 times (Ishan Chandra Ghosh). The Buddha was born quite a few times as animals (not mentioned in the earliest canons), thrice as a low-caste person, twice as a thief and once as a cheat ! Several times, Bodhisattva fell as a victim to sexual and other temptations. There is a clear effort to underline the Vedantic truth about latent divinity in the creatures at all levels. A Buddha-designate proceeds through humble births, even making mistakes, toward the highest form of divine consciousness, namely, Buddhahood. This apparently is the path for every *Pratyek-Buddha* or would-be saints. The Mahayana concept of Bodhisattva however goes much deeper than the concept of *Pratyek-Buddha*, and merges with the Hindu concept of Avatarhood—a celestial God or *Avalokitesvara* who looks after all living creatures for eternity, and, if necessary, 'descends' on the earth for salvation of all mankind. This is the *Abhisambuddha* concept of Bodhisattva which we shall discuss later.

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*E.B. Cowell strangely questions the 'historical credibility' of the Jataka stories while admitting that these 'appear to harmonise with the framework of the Pitakas, ('The Jataka', Preface, p. xi).

The voluminous literature of the Jataka available in Pali as well as in the versions edited by Fausböll, Cowell, Ishan Chandra Ghosh, etc., is, in the words of Coomaraswami (pp. 291-292), 'the most reliable, the most complete, and the most ancient collection of folklore now extant in any literature in the world'. However, the common notion of Jataka anecdotes being mere folklores containing description of ancient India and its customs and manners, with a smattering of morals, as in Aesop's Fables, is unfortunate, in so far as this is a gross underestimate of the significance of Jataka.

In this chapter, we wish to establish that the Bodhisattva anecdotes, particularly the scantily researched *Pratyutpanna-vastu*, or the context parts, throw a floodlight on the *human* qualities of the Buddha and his concept of the hierarchy of values in a religion-based society. It is the lack of knowledge about such anecdotes which has steadily built several myths about the Buddha : that he was an absolute moralist without any regard for the ordinary needs of the householders and concern for strong family and social ties; that he accepted recruits in his Order of monks indiscriminately; that he lacked the sense of humour; that he hated women; that he was a strict vegetarian; that he applied the concept of non-violence even in state matters; that he was a *social* reformer against Brahminism; that he disregarded other paths of religious pursuit and so on. All these myths can be easily exploded. This would further establish the truly rational, democratic and compassionate nature of his sainthood.

We wish to illustrate the following through the Bodhisattva anecdotes: (1) his sense of humour in viewing the human frailties; (2) his view about family ties and friendship; (3) his concept on the value systems in society; (4) his notions about women, sex and transient objects from the mendicant's point of view, and lastly (5) his view about his own spiritual advancement through successive Bodhisattva births, which also epitomizes a typical 'pilgrim's progress' or spiritual ascent of a seeker of truth.

II

Human frailties abounded in the Buddha's society just as in any other epoch or place. He was a keen observer of human weaknesses, sometimes amusing sometimes not, and used these instances to illustrate the eternal lacunae in human society, from the level of which the righteous men must raise themselves.

A merchant devoted to the Buddha was about to be cheated by his business partner. The Master told him the previous birth story, Kuta Banika Jataka (218), in which out-witting of a rogue was described. There were a few cheats and hypocrites in his own Order. Devadatta and Kokalik would praise each other as an ex-prince and an ideal Brahmin, respectively, in presence of villagers, to obtain larger chunk of alms (294). Kokalik tried this trick once when he was in the holy company of Sariputra and Maudgallayana. He extolled the two saints in presence of the villagers who brought huge quantity of presents. To the utter dismay of Kokalik, the valuable presents were rejected by the saints as a token of disapproval of Kokalik's trick (481). Upananda was a greedy and cunning monk. He would talk about renunciation to any fellow-monk possessing a luxury item, so that it would be given up only to be grabbed by the preacher (296, 400). A greedy nun used to warn others deceptively in Jetavana 'against some mad animals' in some parts of the city, so that she alone could go there and pick up alms exclusively (Anusasika Jataka, 115).

The folly of killing the duck, which lays golden eggs or provides golden feather, has been immortalised in the Buddha's parable (136). The context in which the story was narrated is probably more interesting. *Sthula* (fat) Nanda, a nun, went to the farm of a lay disciple of the Master for some garlic. When asked to help herself, she carried away an excessive quantity out of greed. When this matter was reported to the Master, he rebuked the nun, prohibited eating of garlic by the nuns in future, and narrated the Suvarnahamsa Jataka (136) story, ending with the verse : "They seized the swan—but had its gold no more".

It was indeed difficult for some monks to give up their food-habits. Over-eating caused a death (255). In another case, the Buddha watched a monk addicted to covetousness, and narrated a humorous previous birth story entitled Dūta-Jataka (260) (briefly mentioned in Appendix I).

Another equally humorous and yet instructive episode took place when the Buddha wanted to teach a lesson to an exceptionally miserly millionaire near Rajagriha, who would have rice-cakes prepared for him alone in the privacy of his seventh floor apartment. How the miser ended up distributing the food amongst a large gathering of Buddhist monks, is indeed very interesting : Illis Jataka (78) (Synopsis in Appendix II). The Master never failed to contrast miserliness with philanthropy; indeed he remarked about a selfless monk who never took any food without sharing the same with others, that the monk had got his lesson (like the Rajagriha multi-millionaire) in his previous birth, when he was heartless and miserly (Sudhabhojana Jataka, 535).

Just imagine five hundred women of Sravasti, all friends of the pious Visakha, getting thoroughly drunk with strong wine, and dancing with obscene movements before the Master—this really happened! The Buddha of course did not feel delighted in this instance. His stern rebuke brought the ladies to their senses, and his saintly anguish found poignant expression through a verse :

"No place for laughter here, no room for joy
The flames of passion suffering worlds destory".
(also quoted in Dhammapada)

Then the Master narrated a previous birth story (Kumbha Jataka, 512) illustrating that the evil of drinking had ruined family and social life even in the distant past. The reference to the drunk Yadava's (Krishna's colleagues) killing each other is very interesting :

"It was after drinking this, I ween
The Andhakas and Vrishni race

Roaming along the shore, were seen
To fall, each by his Kinsman's mace."

III

On Family Ties and Friendship

It would be a canard to state that the Buddha did not appreciate the need of strong family ties in society. The emotional link between the parents and the children is, according to him, the chief force sustaining the society. The love and care bestowed upon the children have to be reciprocated by an acute sense of duty to the aged parents.

A lay disciple of the Master was persuaded by his mother to marry, and as ill luck would have it, the wife started ill-treating her mother-in-law. When the wife told her husband mischievously that she could not live with her 'grumbling' mother-in-law, the dutiful son told his wife that she was free to quit! The Master heard this incident, and applauded his disciple's act which had ultimately restrained his wife's misdeeds. Then the story was told of his previous birth (Katyāyani Jataka, 417) when he had cast out his mother at his erring wife's bidding, and yet the pious mother prayed for the welfare of her son and grandsons. Such mothers, always caring for their children's welfare and observing the famous *Katyāyani vrata*, have indeed sustained the Indian society for ages.

In Takkala Jataka (446), we find a similar situation. Another disciple of the Master found his wife repeatedly ill-treating his widower father when he firmly intervened. The Master narrated how his disciple was going to commit patricide, at the behest of his wife, in one of his previous births. Bodhisattva was his young son and with an idea to reform his father, imitated his act of digging a pit. When asked why he was digging a pit, Bodhisattva replied :

"I too, when thou art aged, father mine
Will treat my father as thou treatest thine;
Following the custom of the family
Deep in a pit I too will bury thee!"

In Dasaratha Jataka (461), he narrated the supreme sacrifice of Rama, made as a token of reverence for his father Dasaratha. The story is like that of Ramayana, except that here Sita is the hero's sister, not his wife.

The Buddha had left his family at the supreme call of renunciation and self-realisation. This act did not amount to negligence of duty, since the royal family could look after itself. However, he later promised at Kapilavastu, after his half-brother Nanda entered his Order, that new recruits must hereafter obtain prior permission of their parents. The context of Shyāma Jataka (540) describes the touching story of a dutiful monk. This disciple of the Master had obtained the approval for adopting monkhood from his aged parents who eventually became too poor to maintain themselves. The monk continued to support his parents by sharing the alms obtained by begging. Such an act of a monk supporting lay men through offerings received from the faithful ones was apparently in violation of the Vinaya or the rules of the Order. Yet, when the Buddha heard this account, he applauded the monk by uttering *Sādhu* (well-done) three times. Then he narrated, how he, as Bodhisattva, had supported his aged blind parents even after adopting monkhood. This story is very similar to that of Andhaka Muni's son (in Ramayana) being inadvertently killed by King Dasaratha. Bodhisattva had stated that of the ten duties necessary to reach the world of the Gods, the foremost was the duty to the parents.

The Buddha described the qualities of an ideal housewife in Sujata Jataka (269). Daughter of the great merchant Dhananjaya, youngest sister of Visakha, and daughter-in-law of Anathapindada, Sujata was extremely haughty and rude to her servants, in-laws as well as to her husband, till the Master reformed her. The Buddha described that there are seven kinds of housewives.

The first three categories, *viz.*, *badhakā* (hates husband and loves some other man), *chourī* (misuses husband's wealth towards selfish ends) and *prachandā* (lazy and haughty), are reborn in hell. The other (four) categories, *viz.*, *mātrisamā* (nurses all), *bhaginīsamā* (like younger sister to her husband), *sakhīsamā* (loving husband and other family members), and *dāsīsamā* (serving all without anger and discontentment), are destined to attain spiritual bliss. The Buddha further narrated how he, when born as a prince in a previous birth (269), reformed his haughty queen mother by contrasting the harsh voice of a beautiful blue jay with the melodious voice of a black cuckoo. Much more important than physical beauty is gentle manners of the housewife, which alone would bring peace in a family.

In Bhallatiya Jataka (504), the Buddha sang the glory of conjugal love and harmony before his royal disciples—King Prasenjit and queen Mallika who had been estranged from each other temporarily over a domestic quarrel. Bodhisattva was once born as King Bhallatiya of Varanasi, too addicted to hunting and excursion to discharge his family and social duties. In one of his excursions to the Himalayas, he met a *Kinnara-Kinnari* couple (fairies or exquisite-looking and music-loving people in the Himalayan heights) embracing each other and weeping. On being questioned why they were weeping, they explained to the king, how on an earlier occasion, a flash-flood had separated them stranded on the opposite sides of a mountain brook and ruined their contemplated romantic night. They were weeping over this past episode, and regretting the loss of romance of even a single night. Bodhisattva as King Bhallatiya was impressed by this wonderful spirit of conjugal love, and regretted that he was ignoring his wife in the pursuit of hunting and other objects of pleasure. The Buddha advised Prasenjit and Mallika not to make a similar mistake :

"Take a lesson from the fays
And quarrel not, but mend your ways.
Lest you suffer, like the fairy,
Your own error all your days."
(Cowell, IV, p. 275)

Gautama and Yaśodharā

One, who does not accept the glory of genuine renunciation and monasticism, may disapprove of a saint getting away from his wife for the sake of spiritual enlightenment. Such a critic may also wonder whether the Buddha was not like his previous existence, King Bhallatiya, in ignoring his wife and family duties.

We can only be amused at such a comparison, if made, and point out that spiritual struggle is not the same thing as a hunting expedition. Nevertheless, it is necessary to record how the Buddha viewed and treated his wife.

When Gautama had left her, Yaśodharā lamented :

"Surely he has not heard of our ancestors who took their wives with them to the forest, or else he does not see that in the (Vedic) sacrifices it is both husband and wife who are consecrated and purified by the precepts of the Veda, enjoying together the recompense of the rites; he has become *miserly* of *dharma* towards me." (Asvaghosa, Buddhacharita, 8. 62 & 63)

On the Buddha's revisiting Kapilavastu, his father narrated to him about Yaśodharā's sacrifice : "When she heard that you wore yellow robes, she robed herself in yellow, gave up garlands and such things and refused the gifts that other kings sent to her. So faithful is her heart to you" (Jataka, 485). Then the Buddha narrated one of the famous previous birth stories [Chandra Kinnara Jataka (485)]: What tender and romantic love he and Yaśodharā had as Chandrā Kinnara and Chandrā Kinnarī in a previous birth, and how deeply loyal and loving she was to him (Appendix III).

It was with a great effort that the would-be saint, still a 'Bodhisattva', had overcome his deep emotion about Yaśodharā, when he renounced the family life for a nobler cause. Only a tender-hearted saint like Swami Vivekananda could re-capture the *human* feeling of the Buddha :

"The Gods sang, 'Arise! Help the world', and the struggling prince returned again and again to the bedside of his sleeping wife. What was the problem that vexed him ? Why! It was *she* whom he was about to sacrifice for the world! *That* was the struggle."

For seven years, she wore yellow robe. When her husband-teacher arrived, she instructed her son to ask for 'patrimony' from the Buddha. Eventually, Yaśodharā became a disciple of her husband, who was then *not 'miserly of dharma'* towards her.*

And then, continued Vivekananda : "All the pent-up love and pity of those seven years welled forth in the Jataka Birth-Stories ! For they were all for her ! Five hundred times each had forgotten self. And now they would enter into perfection together.... Let none ever venture to compare another with Him !" (Memoirs of Swami Vivekananda in Sister Nivedita's "The Master as I Saw Him", pp. 255-258). One can 'venture' to compare the Buddha only with Sri Ramakrishna. Both of them, together with their holy consorts, proved to the world that the ideal marriage and the highest spiritual attainments are not incompatible. They are our ideals for the re-construction of humanity.

Mahotkrosa Jataka (486) records the Buddha's appreciation for the bonds of genuine friendship and the institution of marriage. One of his lay disciples had wanted to marry a girl in Sravasti, when he was told to first make some genuine friends

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*She was looked after in the monastery by the Buddha's foremost disciple Sariputra, through her son, Rahula, who received religious counselling from Sariputra as an apprentice monk. There are Jataka stories (281 & 292) related to Yaśodharā's flatulescence and stomach problem, when she was served with mango juice/sugar and rice with new ghee/soup of *Rohu* (Rohit) fish respectively.

(before marriage)—who would later help during crisis. He proceeded to establish friendship, through his gentle manners, with low and high dignitaries and even with the King and lastly with the Buddha (before becoming his disciple). With his success in making so many illustrious friends, he came to be known as *Mitra-gandhaka*, 'a man of many friends'. Naturally, he could win the girl as his wife, many costly presents and, what was most important, the participation and blessing of the Buddha and his disciples during the marriage. The Buddha went to his house and told the story of a male hawk who had made friendships with all animals, including a lion, before marrying a she-hawk. Later in the time of crisis, his friends helped his family.

It is evident that the Buddha attended parties given by newly-married couples if they were truly devoted to *Dharma* or truth. There was a famous episode : 'the marriage-feast in Jambunada' (Carus, pp. 163-164 quoting Fu-Pen-Hing-tsi-King translated by S. Beal and Explanatory Addition). The Buddha attended one marriage festival at the earnest request of the bridegroom who was a young man deeply attached to him. The Buddha blessed the couple and delivered his beautiful sermon on the institution of marriage :

"The greatest happiness which a *mortal* man can imagine is the bond of marriage that ties together two living hearts. But there is a greater happiness still. It is the embrace of truth. Death will separate husband and wife, but death will never affect him who has espoused the truth. Therefore, be married unto the truth and live with the truth in holy wedlock... Let no man be single, let every one be wedded in holy love to the truth."

The Buddha always emphasized that the love for truth is the core of an ideal married life, based upon mutual loyalty and moral purity, and a step towards the spiritual ascent.

IV

Values in Society

The Buddha worked hard for the spiritual upliftment of his monk disciples, but he was not oblivious of the spiritual needs of the society and the householders. He tried to inculcate honesty in all walks of life, and highlighted the age-old principle that even for the merchants, honesty is the best policy (Seri Vanija Jataka, 3). He extolled the virtue of sharing the riches and charity towards the poor and the virtuous (Sudha Bhojana Jataka, 535).* According to him, charity has to be compounded with genuine compassion and fellow-feeling. He remarked to Anathpindada : "The best food is that which is given in love. There is no flavour equal to that of love" (Kesava Jataka, 346).

During the Vedic period, the Aryans believed in auspicious rituals ushering prosperity to the society signified by good omens (*mahā mangala*). The Buddha explained the essence of the auspicious rites. Real peace and prosperity in the society are invoked, according to him, not by mere recitation of the Vedic verses, but through five-fold *mangala-kriyā* or ritual : loving all creatures and obtaining love in return, courtesy even to the discourteous, avoiding boastful ego for riches or knowledge, etc., charity and service to others with a smiling face, and lastly showing respect to the wise men and saints (Maha Mangala Jataka, 453).

On Non-Violence and Justice

The Buddha praised *ahiṁsā*—the absence of hatred, jealousy and desire for senseless killing. However, his *Kshatriya* and royal background taught him to respect social justice equally strongly. Thus, he was *not* an unqualified supporter of the creed of 'non-violence' which is etymologically different from *ahiṁsā*.

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* Vide Chapter 7 of this book for a discussion on the Buddha's views regarding social justice.

For example, he was not a vegetarian like Mahavira, the Jaina saint. While he fearlessly fought against the Vedic ritual of animal sacrifice for 'propitiating gods', he did not endorse Mahavira's ideal of total abstinence from flesh and fish. His 'middle path' approach was one of the reasons why Devadatta moved away from him. The Buddha told Jivaka (Jivaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya, 1.368) that a monk should not ask that meat be specifically prepared for him; but otherwise, offered meat could be accepted. As a matter of fact, the Buddha died of eating rotten meat offered to him by the blacksmith Chunda. We have already pointed out that sick Yaśodharā received as a nun, cooked fish (Jataka, 292); taking of macchamamsa (fish) was expressly allowed in Vinaya (1. 218, 237). The Buddha ignored his critics, particularly the Tirthikas (Jainas), who considered him to be a lesser saint for having taken meat in the house of Simha Senapati, army general Simha of Vaisali (Telovada Jataka, 246).

In Simha's house, the Buddha not only ate meat, but also settled a far more important issue related to the doctrine of non-violence—the question of righteous war—on which his view turned out to be identical with that of Lord Krishna !

The Issue of Righteous War or Dharma-Yuddha

Senapati Simha put a sterling question to the apostle of non-violence :

"I am a soldier, appointed by the King to enforce his laws and to wage his wars. Does the Tathagata declare that it is wrong to go to war for the protection of our homes, our wives, our children, and our property ? Does the Tathagata teach the doctrine of a complete self-surrender, so that I should suffer the evil-doer to do what he pleases and yield submissively to him who threatens to take by violence what is my own ?"

The Buddha gave an equally brilliant reply reminiscent of the golden message of Gita :

"He who deserves punishment must be punished. When a magistrate punishes, let him not harbour hatred in his breast, yet a murderer, when put to death, should consider that this is the fruit of his own act."

……

"The Tathagata teaches that all warfare in which man tries to slay his brother is lamentable, but he does *not* teach that those who go to war in a *righteous cause, after having exhausted all means to preserve the peace, are blameworthy*. He must be blamed who is the cause of war. He who is victorious should moderate himself, and extinguishing all hatred in his heart lift his downtrodden adversary (as brother). (Compare with Krishna's message.)

"The Tathagata teaches a complete surrender of self, but he does not teach a surrender of anything to those powers that are evil, be they men or gods or the elements of nature. Struggle must be, for all life is a struggle of some kind. (Compare with Swami Vivekananda's message.)

"Struggle then, O general, courageously; and fight thy battles vigorously, but be a soldier of truth and the Tathagata will bless thee" (Carus, pp. 118-120; Mahavagga, 6. 31; Sacred Books of the East, Volume 17, pp. 108-113; The Questions of King Milinda, translated by T.W. Rhys Davids, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 35, pp. 254-257).

The Buddha could not possibly take any interest in warfares, but it is on record that a monk in his Order, who was an ex-war veteran (Dhanurgrahatissa), gave certain advice on war strategy which helped Prasenjit to defeat Ajatasatru (Jataka, 283, 492). In Dhumkari Jataka (413), the Buddha himself tells Prasenjit that the king had been suffering war debacles on account of his preference to the new generals, ignoring the advice of experienced veterans.

Of course, as a messenger of peace and harmony, the Buddha could not support any war fought *senselessly and without a spirit of righteousness*. He intervened in a bloody dispute between the Sakya and Koliya tribes, fought over sharing of river water, and brought peace by wise counselling (Kunala Jataka, 536). He also tried, though unsuccessfully, to prevent the slaughter of the Sakyas at the hand of Virudabha (Bhadda Sala Jataka, 465; for details see Chapter 1 in this book). When King Ajatasatru wished to attack Vaishali, the Buddha commented that it would be difficult to defeat the Vajjis who were *democratically* united and following his advice to be on the path of righteousness (Mahaparinirvana Sutra).

It is thus quite evident that the Buddha was an absolutist on the issue of righteousness, rather than on the issue of non-violence (distinguished from *ahiṁsā*). Like Krishna of the past and Swami Vivekananda of the recent times, he would not like a king, a general or a householder to non-violently surrender himself at the feet of the violent evil.

Though not a social reformer, the Buddha viewed the spectra of social injustice with great concern. In Mahasapna Jataka (77), he vividly describes the impending epochs of niggardly and unrighteous kings, covetous men 'taking bribes from both sides as they sit in the seat of judgement', fierce and cruel kings 'amassing wealth by crushing their subjects like sugarcanes in a mill, and by taxing them to the uttermost' and so on (Cowell, I, pp. 188-190). He made a prophecy about the future, that one Buddha Metteya or Maitreya, apostle of love, would emerge when the level of heartlessness in society reaches the nadir (Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* in Mahavagga, 26, Digha Nikaya). His own compassion for the downtrodden low caste people made him cry out :

"Not by birth does one become an outcast, not by birth does one become a Brahman; by deeds one becomes an outcast, by deeds one becomes a Brahman" (Carus, p. 154; Sutta Nipata; Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 10, Part 2, p. 20).

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*Vide Chapter 7 of this book for additional comments on this topic.

The Buddha on the Question of Caste

The Buddha's outlook on spiritual as well as on social matters was essentially Upanishadic or Vedantic. The Upanishads *tolerate but do not encourage* either animal slaughter in the name of spiritualism, or the hereditary principle of caste. The Buddha went one step further. He stood *against* ritual sacrifice of animals and the 'hereditary rights' of the Brahmins—of course, without waging a 'movement for social reform' in the modern sense. Thus, his revolt was 'not against the metaphysics of the Upanishads but against Brahminical Hinduism' (Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, pp. 692-694).

The Buddha firmly denied 'divine origin' of castes (Majjhima Nikaya or M. 2.148)* and concluded that the four classes or castes have no intrinsic difference : *cattāro vaṇṇā samasamā honti* (M. 2.89). Some Brahmin priests led by Assalāyana were greatly perturbed that Gotama 'proclaims the purity of all the four castes' : *cātuvanniṁ suddhim paññāpeti* (M. 2.147) and came to the Buddha in a body for a debate.

Assalāyana Sutta (M. 2.147) describes how the Teacher replied to the Brahmins with rare sarcasm** and insight : 'can only a Brahmin by taking soap and going to the river wash his

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*The Buddha was armed with a superb notion about the biological and social evolution on the earth. He said that unlike plants, insects, serpents and birds, etc., the race of man (*Homo sapiens*) has no sub-species or caste (Vasettha Sutta, M. 2.196) In Agganna Suttanta (Digha Nikaya, 3.92-98), he described how the concept of property and its infringement led to the *human* creation of castes or classes of protector (*kshatriya*), spiritual teacher (*brāhmana*), merchant (*vaishya*) and working classes (*shudra*).

**The Buddha made many more humorous remarks on this issue, *e.g.*, 'the wives of Brahmins are known to be fertile, yet the womb-born Brahmins say that they are the children of Brahmā' (Digha Nikaya, 3.82) ; 'those who could not meditate (*ajjhāyakā*) in the forest, came back and merely repeated the Vedas' (*ibid.*, 3.94).

dirt—but not a Kshatriya, a Vaishya or a Shudra ?' (M. 2. 183). Is not the divine knowledge accessible to all ?

The Buddha exploded the myth of caste-purity and cited historical examples of the inter-mixture of blood having no disastrous consequences whatsoever ! (M. 2. 153-156). The psychological make-up of a new-born baby is not solely determined by parentage (genetic factor) ; the psychic factor or the previous Karma of the spirit (*gandhabba*) seeking rebirth is equally important (M. 2. 157). The four-fold division of society is by no means absolute. Economic factors may certainly change the hierarchical structure in the society; 'one who is a master may become a slave and one who is a slave may become a master' : '*ayyo hutvā dāso hoti dāso hutvā ayyo hotī'ti*' (M. 2. 149).*

In the Buddha's view, the Brahmin can claim superiority in the society *only if* he emulates the spiritual traditions of the Rishi or Arhat. The Master told Ambattha, an arrogant Brahmin: "If a workman talks like a king, he does not thereby become a king or even as one of his officers. Just so, Ambattha, those ancient Rishis (Angirasa, Bharadwaj, Kashyapa, Bhrigu, etc.) composed verses, whose ancient forms of words, so chanted, uttered, or composed, the Brahmins of today chant over again and rehearse, intoning or reciting exactly as has been intoned or recited...should you (a Brahmin) on that account be a Rishi, or said to have attained to the state of a Rishi ?" (Ambattha Sutta, Digha Nikaya, 1.104; Rhys Davids, "Dialogues", Part 1, p. 129).

Let us dilate on the amusing Ambattha anecdote at this stage. The arrogant Brahmin, Ambattha, came to the Master and abused his ancestry : "The Sakyas are menials, mere menials". The Buddha, for once in his ascetic life, shot back saying that *his* Sakya lineage was derived from the famous Kshatriya King Ikshaku of Suryavaṁsa (ancestry from Rama), whereas Ambattha's ancestor Kanha was black, and born of

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*Further discussions on caste are presented in Chapter 7.

King Ikshaku's slave girl! "The Kshatriya is the best of those among this folk who put their trust in lineage" (Ambattha Sutta). At the same time, Kanha was a 'true Brahmin', since he obtained supreme Enlightenment. In one stroke, the Buddha established that Kshatriya was better in lineage, but the Rishis (Brahmin by birth or not) the greatest.

The Buddha was never tired of telling who are 'true Brahmins' or rishis, and who are not. In Dhammapada, an entire section (no. 26 : Brāhmaṇavarga) is devoted to the greatness of the *true* Brahmins.

"Not by matted hair, not by lineage, not by caste, does one become a Brahmin. He is a Brahmin in whom there are truth and righteousness. He is blessed" (26.393).

"Him I call a Brahmin who is fearless (like a bull), noble, heroic, the all-wise, who has overcome (death), the sinless who has accomplished his study, the awakened" (26.422).

"Rshabham prabaram vīram maharshim bijitārim anejam
Snātakam bidhoutam buddham tam aham brāhmanam brabīmi"

On the other hand, one who merely brags 'I am so and so' (Bhobadi*) and boasts of his ancestry, is not fit to be called a Brahmin :

"Na chāham brāhmanam brumi yonijam mātrisambhabaṁ
Bhobadi nāma so... ."*

We have not made detailed references to the Buddha's observations on the unworthy Brahmins in the Jataka, because this literature is full of them. However, let us briefly mention two Jatakas. In Daśa-Brāhmana Jataka (495), a true Brahmin as well as nine kinds of hypocrites are described :

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*The arrogant Brahmins like Ambattha would address the Buddha without reverence : "*Bho* Gotama !"

"Some follow trade and husbandry,
Keep flocks of goats in fold
They give and take in marriage,
and their daughters sell for gold".
(Jataka, 495; Cowell IV, p. 229)

In Bhuridatta Jataka (no. 543; Cowell VI, p. 110) we find the stinging couplets :

"Doctrines and rules of their own, absurd and vain
Our sires imagined, wealth and power to gain
He who has eyes can see the sickening sight
Why does not Brahmā set his creatures right ?"

From such instances it would appear to some that the Buddha himself wanted to 'set (Brahma's) creatures right', and that he was a social reformer. But that impression would be wrong. Rhys Davids puts it aptly, when he says that the Buddha was neither a political reformer nor one indifferent to the harshness of caste rules ("Dialogues", Part I, p. 96). Oldenberg writes : "Buddha's spirit was a stranger to that enthusiasm without which no one can pose as the champion of the oppressed against the oppressor... . Caste has no value for him, for everything earthly has ceased to effect his interest; but it never occurs to him to exercise his influence for its abolition or for the mitigation of the severity of its rules for those who have lagged behind in worldly surroundings."

(Buddha, pp. 153-154)

He did not have the 'burning enthusiasm for the earthly kingdom so necessary for a social reformer' (Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, pp. 437-439).

In one sense, however, he *was* a reformer. He reformed the Order of rishi-hood or arhat-hood, which was being equated with priest-hood or the higher caste. His spiritual order or *sangha* was the first of its kind in the world, and therefore, it is significant that this Order became casteless. In the Uddalaka Jataka (487) a beautiful verse says :

"Khattiya, Brahmin, Vessa,
Sudda and Candala, Pukkusa
All these can be compassionate,
Can win Nirvana's bliss."

(Cowell, IV, p. 191)

The Buddha's message in the Udana, 5.5, strongly resembles the Upanishadic poetry :

"Just as, O monks, the great rivers such as the Ganges, the Yamuna...when they fall into the ocean, lose their former names and clans and are known as the ocean, even so do the four castes, when they have gone forth in the Doctrine and Discipline, taught by the Tathagata, lose their former names and clans and are known as ascetics". (compare with Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 3. 2. 8.)

The Buddha was not a social reformer, and yet, his prescription that even a sweeper (like Sunita) or a shudra can become a monk, equal in status with a Brahmin in his Order, definitely undermined the institution of caste, with long-range *social* implications. We shall discuss in the seventh chapter, how these implications are relevant even today.

V

Values in the Monastic Order

The values in the monastic order, according to the Indian and therefore the Buddha's tradition, had to imbibe all the best in the ennobling social values enumerated before, and yet transcend these and reach still greater heights. The Master was never tired of pointing out the greatness of renunciation. Even a casual conversation by some monks, who had gone past a prison-house of Kosala, and seen criminals bound fast in chains and fetters, led him to say that 'the fetters which consist of a craving (*taṇhā*) for wealth, corn, sons, wives and children are stronger, and harder to break; only the ascetics could break such fetters and be free (Bandhanāgāra Jataka, 201). The earthly life is evanescent, and one should not give up one's spiritual task when one loses near and dear ones. In this connection, he told of his previous birth when he, as a brother, consoled the aggrieved Krishna (Ghata Jataka, 454; see Appendix IV) of Gita fame.

On Women

The greatest obstacle to spiritual progress, according to all Indian saints including the Buddha, is attachment to sex. Since for male spiritual aspirants, sex and women are naturally interconnected, many of the Buddha's teachings appear to be anti-women.

There are many stories in the Jataka about the 'treacherous nature and infidelity of women' (such as Asatamantra, 61; Bandhanamoksha, 120; Kunala, 536, etc.), but basically all these anecdotes merely illustrate unbridled lust exhibited by *both* the sexes (Putimansha, 437). The Master narrated how he himself as the King Shibi of Arisṭhapura (in a previous birth) got sexually infatuated with the beauty of Unmadayanti (literally means 'maddening') who happened to be his friend and commander-in-chief Ahiparaka's wife (Unmādayanti Jataka, 527). In this case, the lady was virtuous and not responsible for the passion her beauty evoked in the mind of Bodhisattva king. Bodhisattva fortunately controlled himself and confessed to his friend about his unholy emotion which he was determined to control :

> "I would not by an unjust act
> even heaven itself attain
> No, not if, Ahiparaka
> the whole world I should gain."
> (Cowell, V, p. 115)

The Master mentions in another interesting anecdote that when in a previous birth (Kanavera Jataka, 318) he was convicted of death-sentence as a robber, a courtesan Shyāmā felt sexually attracted to his physical features, and had a romantic foolish young man (her admirer) die in place of Bodhisattva just to satisfy her. Eventually, Bodhisattva ran away from Shyāmā saying :

"Me too Shyāmā would betray
Were I not to flee away."*

In none of the anecdotes, women were exclusively blamed. The enemy of a spiritual aspirant is not woman or *Kāminī* (object of passion) but *Kām* (passion) itself. In Mahāhamsa Jataka (534), Bodhisattva asks his friend not to speak ill of women :

"Seeds within them germinate,
source from whence all life is sustained,
They from whom man draws his breath
scarce by man may be disdained."
(Cowell, V, p. 195)

In Suvarnamriga Jataka (359), the Buddha extols a lady of Sravasti who got married in a family of heretics, and yet led her husband and in-laws steadily towards the spiritual path, solely through her glorious devotion to the Buddha. How could the Master be anti-woman, when he had scores of lady disciples, both nun and lay, like Vasakha, Utpalvarna, Patachara and so on? As a matter of fact, he was soft to women (like his dear disciple Ānanda). Or else, how could he start the first Order of nuns in the human history?

Though he was apprehensive that the entry of nuns might degenerate the Order in the long run, and prophesied that the Order would not, for this reason, last more than 500 years, yet he accepted that women are fully capable of realising Arhatship or sainthood, provided they observe strict monastic rules.

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*It is worth noting how the poet Rabindranath Tagore has u ed this story, and given it a strange turn.—Vide Appendix V.

The Master's step-mother, Mahaprajapati, was the first nun to accept the eight strict rules. She thanked and vowed to her step-son with moving words :

"Just as a woman, who is young and fond of adornment, after washing her head receives a garland of lotus or jasmine, even so do I take upon myself these eight strict rules, not to be transgressed while life shall last."

(Anguttara Nikaya, 4. 274)

She, the first among the nuns in any established Order in the world, was followed by the Master's wife and many noble ladies in accepting the sacred vows.

The Ideal of Hrī

The Sanskrit word *hrī* indicates great sublimity—it is the combination of *lajjā*, modesty/lack of ego, and *vivek*, a strong spirit of discrimination. The Buddha extolled the need of this virtue among monks and nuns. He put a strong taboo against self-advertisement and accumulation of luxury items through begging.

There is the remarkable story of Bodhisattva, a saint of exemplary modesty, hesitating for twelve years to beg from the king just a footwear and an umbrella (Brahmadatta Jataka, 323). The Buddha had a disciple of such a supreme modesty and selflessness. Pilindik Batsa was an unassuming monk, even though he possessed supernatural powers. Once, when he was passing through a village, he found young people merry-making, wearing garlands, and a young little girl, born of poor parents, weeping because she did not have a garland. The saint made for her a ring of straw which miraculously turned into a golden necklace. The amazed villagers presented *panchabhaisajya*, five categories of medicinal foods—ghee, butter, honey, oil and molass—to the saint, who in turn handed over the entire gift to the monastery. When some of the lesser monks grabbed the gifts and tried to hoard them, the Buddha exhorted everybody to emulate Pilindik Batsa and prohibited storage or hoarding of donated items (Gandhara Jataka, 406).

The second part of Sudhabhojana Jataka (535) deals with the superiority of *hrī* (modesty and discrimination) over *srī* (fortune and luck), *āshā* (hope) and *biśvās* (faith of the blind type) in a very interesting allegorical story (given in Appendix VI). The story of young prince Gautama saving the life of a swan, injured by an arrow, shot by his cousin Devadatta, is well-known. Such an episode recurred when two monk disciples of the Master saw swans flying over the Achiravati bank. One of them had been a sharp shooter, and challenged by his colleague actually threw a stone which brought down one of the swans dead. The Buddha, on hearing this, remonstrated the erring monks for this senseless killing, and their frivolity and lack of conscience. Then, he narrated the previous birth story (Kurudharma Jataka, 276) to exemplify how in the ancient ages there were many conscientious people *in all walks of life*, who used to feel remorse even with their slightest moral lapses (vide Appendix VII).

The Buddha's Disciples

It is quite evident that there were some monks and nuns in the Buddha's Order, whose habits and characters were far from exemplary. The Buddha was against indiscriminate recruitment of monks in his Order. He was critical of his kind-hearted disciple Sariputra who would try to convert all kinds of people—even naughty hunters and fishermen—to the new faith. In Karandika Jataka (356), the Buddha tells of his former birth, when he was Karandika, a disciple of Sariputra, then a Brahmin teacher. When Sariputra went on trying to reform each and every one he came across, the disciple wanted to teach his teacher. Bodhisattva went on bringing rocks from a nearby hill and filling a cave. On being asked by his teacher what he was doing, Bodhisattva replied that he was trying to bring down the whole hill and level it. The teacher said it was 'impossible', when the disciple shot back :

> "If a man of mortal birth
> Has no power to level earth,
> Heretics may well refuse,
> Brahmin, to adopt thy views." (Cowell, III, p. 114)

The Buddha asked Mahakashyapa and Sariputra to get rid of some of the naughty monks attending them (Kutidusaka Jataka, 321; Varnaroha Jataka, 361). The Master faced many quarrelsome monks, and on one occasion witnessed two *groups* of monks quarrelling at Kosambi, over a very trifling matter (concerning an 'erring' monk, who had put some water to be used for lavatory purpose in a vessel which stored water for rinsing the mouth !). The discord became so intense that the Master cried in agony : "There is a schism in the Brotherhood". He told the quarrelling parties of the Dighitikosala Jataka (371), in which the hero ultimately forgives his father's murderer. Then the Buddha uttered his oft-quoted sermon :

"Not hate, but love alone makes hate to cease
This is the everlasting law of peace."

When the quarrelsome monks would still not listen, he left Kosambi in disgust :

"Shouldst thou fail to meet a kindred friend
It is better for thee in solitude to spend."

(Mahavarga, 10. 1-10; Kosambi Jataka, 428;
Cowell, III, pp. 289-291)

Eventually, the monks repented and sought forgiveness from the Master.

We have earlier mentioned, how he cautioned Ajatasatru's minister about the invincibility of the united Vajjis. When the minister left, the Buddha immediately addressed his disciples about the need of unity in the Sangha, the religious Order :

"So long, O bhikkhus, as the brethren hold full and frequent assemblies, meeting in concord, rising in concord, and attending in concord to the affairs of the Sangha; so long as the brethren shall exercise themselves in the seven-fold higher wisdom of mental activity, search after truth, energy, joy, modesty, self-control, earnest contemplation, and equanimity of mind, so long the Sangha may be expected not to decline, but to prosper."

(Mahaparinirvana Suttanta)

Fortunately, the Buddhist Order stayed in concord notwithstanding the efforts of jealous and notorious monks like Devadatta to disrupt it. Jataka is full of Devadatta stories—his attempt to ape the Master (143), his vanity and jealousy (243), his futile attempts to murder the Buddha (143, 542) leading to his final downfall (Samudrabanij Jataka, 466). Devadatta's accomplice, the patricide King Ajatasatru, however, repented, and his elephant ride to the Buddha's monastery on a Kartika full-moon night is the subject of the poetic Sramanyaphala Sutra of Digha Nikaya. In this Sutra, the Buddha praises the virtue of monkhood. After the repentant king had departed, the Master narrated (Sanjiva Jataka, 150) the story of the fool who learnt the secret of bringing life to a dead tiger, and ruined himself by using this knowledge! Such is the price one has to pay for dabbling with the evil.

The conversion of the fearsome dacoit Angulimala who used to wear a *mālā*, garland made of the *anguli* (fingers) of his slain victims, is a moving episode. The Buddha is reported to have exhibited his supernatural powers several times in his life. But the act of miracle connected with this dacoit, turned saint, is probably the noblest. When Angulimala as a dacoit chased the Buddha in a forest near Sravasti to kill him, the Master seemed to move on and on effortlessly, maintaining the same distance, till the dacoit tired himself. When Angulimala asked the Master to stop and not to move on, the Buddha replied: "I am fixed (in truth) and you are moving (in spiritual wilderness)." The dacoit was reformed and eventually became a great saint (Angulimala Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya).

This episode illustrates the Buddha's concept of a miracle: "the bhikkhu, who renounces the transient pleasures of the world for the eternal bliss of holiness, performs the only miracle that can truly be called a miracle" (Carus, p. 136). The saint, who converts a criminal to a monk, must then be performing a supermiracle. The Buddha narrated in Mahasutasoma Jataka (537), how in a former birth, he similarly reformed a terrible cannibal king (vide Appendix VIII).

The petty-minded disciples in the Buddha's Order were far outweighed by the truly great ones. Even the lay disciples like the merchant Anathapindada or a merchant's wife Visakha (Jataka, 489) showed tremendous spiritual compassion to all fellow-creatures. Some of the nun and monk disciples attained lofty heights of spiritual wisdom and selflessness : Utpalvarna, Patachara (Khullakalinga Jataka, 301), Kashyapa (Mahanarada-kashyapa Jataka,* 544), Maudgallayana (Śarabhanga Jataka, 522), Sariputra and Ānanda, etc. The last two persons deserve very special attention in our discussion.

Sariputra was considered to be the *agraśrāvaka*, the chief disciple of the Buddha, having attained *nirvāṇa* during his teacher's lifetime. He joined the Order with his friend Maudgallayana together, and they promised to tell each other if and when they attain supreme bliss. When Sariputra reached the divine state, his whole appearance and countenance changed, so that later his friend exclaimed : "your face is shining; can it be that you have attained the immortal ?" Sariputra replied, "Yes, friend, I have attained the immortal."

It is for his exalted spiritual experience that the Buddha disagreed to be personally attended by Sariputra. Time and again, Sariputra explained the Buddha's doctrine accurately and faithfully, such as in Sankassya (Kanauj). He firmly repudiated the belief that the Buddha's teaching was negative and nihilistic, and that *nirvāṇa* meant 'nothingness'. The Buddha always appreciated his spiritual insight, and observed that in a previous birth also, his disciple had explained the doctrine of *śūnyavāda* correctly.

The story in Parasahasra Jataka, 99, is extremely significant. In a previous birth, Sariputra was Bodhisattva's disciple. The

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*After converting the renowned fire-worshipper, Uruvela Kashyapa, the Buddha went to Rajagriha where the people wondered who amongst the two was the teacher. The Buddha made Kashyapa say, how he had realised the futility of fire-sacrifices and accepted the Buddha as his teacher. This was probably the *earliest* occasion for the Buddha to narrate a previous birth story.

other disciples of Bodhisattva thought that their teacher's deathbed remark '*nāsti kinchit*' ('nothing there') meant that his spiritual attainment had been nil, whereas Sariputra correctly interpreted the '*śūnyavāda*' in this remark as signifying 'nothing permanent in this phenomenal evanescent world'. It appears that the Master foresaw that his philosophy would suffer serious distortion through some of his followers and later-day interpreters. He bewailed :

> "Far better than a thousand fools
> Crying out a hundred years
> Is one who straightaway understands"
>
> (Jataka, 99; Cowell, I, p. 241)

The Glorious Ānanda, 'a Moon in the Heavens'

During the first twenty years after his Buddhahood, the Master used to be attended by different disciples from time to time. Some of them were not careful enough. The Buddha was getting old, and wanted a constant companion. Sariputra was the first to claim the privilege of serving him, but the Master would not accept one who had already attained *nirvāṇa.* Ānanda, the faithful, had not yet reached great spiritual heights, and this brought him luck; he was chosen as the Master's constant companion. Furthermore, Ananda's request for eight boons—four negative and four positive—were granted. The Buddha would not give Ānanda the robe or the food offered to him, take Ānanda where he is invited or let Ānanda stay in the same fragrant cell (*gandhakutira*) where he lived. On the other hand, he *would* accompany Ānanda if the latter were invited to some place, allow the disciple to introduce new visitors to him, settle all his doubts, and lastly—what has been very important to the Buddhist world—would keep Ānanda near him during *all* his discourses, and if the disciple were absent, repeat the entire discourse, when the disciple arrived! This last boon enabled Ānanda to become the *Sutta-dhar* and *dharmakosha* : the keeper of the gospel and the treasurer of dharma (Theragatha, 1031). While agreeing to offer the eight famous boons, the Buddha described, how the disciple had earned similar boons from him in a previous birth (Jyotsna Jataka, 456).

Jataka describes Ānanda as having shone in the Buddhist world as 'the moon in the heavens'. The light of the Sun, the Buddha, always shone on him. He was 'unrivalled in service and nursing' (Anguttara Nikaya, 1.24). Ānanda describes himself as the shadow of the Buddha :

> "*pannabiśati bassāni bhagabantam upatthahim*
> *metten kāyakammen bachikammen manokammen*
> *chhāyāiba anupāyinī*"

"For twenty-five years, I have lovingly served the Lord through physical labour, speech and thought, and followed him like a shadow."

(Theragatha, 1041-43)

The Jataka is full of anecdotes regarding Ānanda's selfless service, love for his teacher, all fellow-disciples and the womenfolk (the Buddha admitted them as nuns only under Ānanda's entreaties; after the Lord's death, he was accused by the Sangha for his role!), and his egoless sainthood. We would mention one striking episode.

Devadatta had repeatedly tried to kill the Buddha—employing archers, who later became the Master's disciples, pushing down a boulder down the Gridhrakuta hill, etc.—but when all these attempts failed, he made the last effort with the connivance of Ajatasatru. He set a rogue elephant, Nalagiri, maddened with strong drink, in the Buddha's path. The Buddha wished to change the elephant's heart by supernatural power, and stood straight before the beast. Ānanda intervened thrice, ignoring his teacher's command, to 'save' the saviour. The Buddha had to remove Ānanda using his (supernatural) power; then the mad elephant came his way charging, looked at his divine appearance spellbound, and fell at his feet. The Master addressed the tamed Nalagiri :

> "From mad and foolish recklessness abstain
> The reckless fool to heaven will never attain."

(Cowell, V, p. 177)

The disciples were charmed at this splendid performance of miracle, and later started talking about Ānanda's emotion and act of sacrifice, when the Master narrated how Ānanda had always followed him and tried to sacrifice his life for the teacher so many times in the previous births (Chullahamsa Jataka, 533; Mahahamsa Jataka, 534, etc.).

Mahaparinirvana Sutra is full of the Master's conversation with Ānanda on *Dharma* and *Sangha*. After the Buddha's death, Ānanda was accused of minor lapses including the fantastic 'charge' that he favoured women in receiving the Master's blessings and discipleship. Soon he attained Arhathood, and his narratives of the Buddha's gospel came to be honoured as the earliest canon.

VI

The Evolution of Bodhisattva

Before we pursue the above theme, let us face the question of plausibility of the Bodhisattva anecdotes. We have mentioned in the early part of this chapter that the Buddha's references to his earlier births are found even in the oldest canons, and therefore, the genuinity of the Jataka anecdotes can hardly be questioned. In one instance, the Buddha's disciples received corroboration of the previous birth theme from an unexpected quarter.

We are told in Saketa Jataka (68, 237) how the Master, entering the city of Saketa (Ayodhya) with his disciples, encountered an old Brahmin couple, who clasped him by the ankles and cried : "Son, is it not the duty of children to cherish the old age of their parents? Why have you not let us see you all this long time ?" They took the Master and his disciples to their house, and entertained them with food. On return to Anjanavana, the Buddha told his disciples that the aged pair were right in claiming him as their son (in a previous birth). Anguttara Commentary (1.400) provides the description of a similar incident. When Buddha was touring in the land of the Bhaggas during the eighth year of his Buddhahood and entered Suṁsumāragiri, a householder Nakulapitā and his wife came and called the Buddha as their 'son' in many previous births.

This phenomenon of some people having *purvanivāsa jñāna*, the knowledge of having previous births, is an axiom in the Hindu view of life, and is only as mysterious as the fact that most people do not have this faculty! The Buddha's recollection of so many births made him and others understand the evolution of the 'Bodhisattva character' from the humble births ending up to the most sublime as Gautama Buddha.

It has been reported (Rhys Davids, Buddhist India, Chapter XI) that in the earliest canons, the Buddha in his previous birth is never identified with an animal, or even with an ordinary man; he is identified only with some famous sage of bygone times. This is understandable, since the Buddha's followers were hesitant to accept Bodhisattva as anything less than the Buddha or some sage of equivalent stature. The Jataka anecdotes, however, make it abundantly clear that Bodhisattva passed through a path of spiritual ascent often marked by humbler births or even temporary downfall.

We have already told the story of Bodhisattva as a thief involved with a courtesan, Shyāmā (318) and as a king enchanted with the beauty of his friend's wife, Unmādayantī (527). The Buddha did not hesitate to narrate how he was smitten with sexual passion even as a celebrated monk in a previous birth. When one of his lay disciples went astray with sexual fire, the Master exclaimed : "Shall not the wind that shakes Mount Sumeru also stir a heap of old leaves ? This sin has troubled the enlightened Buddha himself." Then he narrated Samkalpa Jataka (251) in which Boddhisattva, a venerable monk, accidentally saw his hostess, the queen, in nude condition and then, 'the evil passion that had been calmed by the power of his ecstasy, rose as a cobra rises, spreading his hood, from the basket in which he is kept'. On this occasion, he could restrain himself with great difficulty, and left the kingdom for strenuous spiritual practices. The Harita Jataka (431) gives a similar account, in which the Bodhisattva as a monk finally succumbed to the 'sinful feeling that had been dwelling for a countless aeons in his heart', and misconducted with his hostess, the queen. And yet, both the queen and the monk confessed to the king about their guilt, and renewed their march on the righteous path.

According to the Buddha, even the saints may err, while some animals could be on the righteous path. Bodhisattva as the king of five hundred deer (Nyagrodha Mriga Jataka, 12) and the leader of a group of monkeys (Mahakapi Jataka, 407), etc., was ever-ready to sacrifice for the members of his group. The second story (407) in which the hero 'made himself a bridge for his friends (other monkeys) to pass through in safety' has been immortalised through sculpture on the Bharhut Stupa (vide Appendix IX for the story); and this is very significant. Even a monkey could have the Buddha's heart, and after evolution through successive births, could emerge as a saviour of mankind, and a 'bridge' across the gulf of ignorance, over which the spiritual aspirants may march towards their destination.

At this stage, it is instructive to recall the penetrative thoughts of poet Rabindranath Tagore on the philosophy of the Bodhisattva anecdotes (collected works in Bengali, Vol. 11, essay entitled 'Buddhadeva') :

"The Jataka stories teach us that the Buddha, the enlightened soul, reveals itself across ages through common creatures. The eternal conflict between the good and the evil in the animal and human world is the moving panorama highlighting the emergence of the Buddha, the supreme embodiment of Dharma. The greatest manifestation of the force of goodness lies in sacrifice and unbounded love for others. The infinite love and fellow-feeling amongst the living creatures leads humanity steadily towards egolessness and *nirvāṇa*... . That the Buddha could have been born as a (loving kind) cow was easily accepted by the recorder of the Jataka which acknowledges extraordinary spiritual possibilities within ordinary acts of compassion."

(a free translation of Tagore's inimitable Bengali prose)

Through many ups and downs in the spiritual path across successive births, the real spark came, when our hero Bodhisattva resolved to become the Buddha. Born as the Brahmin Sumedha in Amravati, Bodhisattva came across one Buddha (enlightened soul) named Dipankara. So far, Bodhisattva had been an ordinary spiritual aspirant seeking his personal salvation. Now he wanted to be like Dipankara, a future Buddha :

"I shall be the Buddha
 the saviour of men and gods
Why attain salvation *alone* ?
 Save others this world across."

(Jataka Nidana)

It is further mentioned in the Nidana (introduction to the Jataka) that Bodhisattva resolved to cultivate ten virtues (or *pāramitā*, bridges) to attain Buddhahood : *dān* or philanthropy with utmost selflessness, *śīla* (right conduct), *naiskramya* (mental detachment from this evanescent world), *prajñā* (thirst for spiritual learning), *birya* (lion-like courage), *kshānti* (aloofness and forgiving nature), *satya* (firm attachment to truth), *adhisthāna* (steadfastness), *maitrī* (love) and *upekshā* (equanimity). The hero would firmly instil these virtues in his human heart to make it divine, and there would be no turning back.

Infinite love and compassion to the fellow-creatures induced in Bodhisattva's heart an insatiable thirst for philanthropy and even self-sacrifice. As the King Sivi (Sivi Jataka, 499), he donated even his eyes to a Brahmin who needed them, uttering :

"In giving thus, not glory is my goal,
Not sons, not wealth, or kingdoms to control :
This is the good old way of holy men
of giving gifts enamoured is my soul."

(Cowell, IV, p. 253)

Thus, he defined the foundation of a religious life :

"Self-sacrifice in all men mortal living,
Of all things is most fine
I sacrificed a mortal eye; and giving
Received an eye divine."

To all men he appealed :

"See, people ! see, give ere ye eat,
let others have a share.
This done *with your best will and care*,
Blameless to heaven you shall repair."

(Cowell, IV, p. 256)

The last story of the Jataka (547) is that of the last birth of Bodhisattva (before being born as Gautama Buddha) as Vishwantara, King Sivi's grandson (Appendix X). As a prince devoted to giving gifts, he gave away a prized magical elephant to some outsiders, and was banished by the angry people of his own kingdom. Having gone to the forest with his family, Vishwantara* gave away everything he had, including his children. He was willing to sacrifice his wife and himself too, when a god came, helped him to be re-united with his family, and granted him eight boons. The last boon (Bodhisattva ever asked) was :

"Ferry me safe over existence sea
Beyond the world of birth and gods
I will cross and I will be free."

(Cowell, VI, p. 282 and p. 295)**

During the last few births immediately preceding that of Gautama Buddha, Bodhisattva was born as a saint or saintly king/prince. These are the anecdotes carefully recorded in the

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*In the Pali text, the word used is *Vessantara*, probably meaning one who was born in a garden owned by a Vaishya or merchant. Jatakamala text however gives it as *Vishwantara* or *Vishwantra*, one who saves (*tra*) the world (*Vishwa*).

**When the Buddha re-visited Kapilavastu for the first time after his Buddhahood, he had to show a miracle before his erstwhile elders saluted him as a saint. It was followed by the legendary magical rainfall (*pushkaravarshā*) in which 'only those who desired to be wet were wetted' (meaning divine grace is received only by those who seek it). Then the Master narrated the Jataka of Vishwantra (547), that he would be saviour of the world.

earliest canons as mentioned by Rhys Davids. It is interesting to note that these advents took place in the sites not very far from Kapilavastu.

In his death-bed at Kushinara (formerly Kusavati), the Buddha recalled how he had died in the same place as King Sudarsana telling his wife Subhadra* about the transient nature of all things in this world. (Mahasudarsana Jataka, 95; Mahaparinirvana Sutra). During his re-visit to Kapilavastu, the Master told Ānanda that he had been born in the holy place Kapilavastu earlier, as a black saint (Kanha Jataka, 440) (as the philosopher Kapila himself ?).

Now, we come to the end of this chapter and illustrate the Bodhisattva concept, that renunciation for spiritual attainment is the *highest* virtue, better than even loving-kind philanthropy. Whereas the latter is the solid foundation of the moral structure, the former is the peak or culmination. This is beautifully illustrated in the Makhadeva Jataka (9) (also mentioned in Majjhima Nikaya, 2.75) and Nemi Jataka (541).

Bodhisattva born successively as Makhadeva, and his descendant Nemi, belonged to the royal family of the Videha empire with Mithila in North Bihar as its capital. (The anecdote was narrated by the Master while staying in a mango-garden at Mithila.) King Janaka (father of Sita in the Ramayana epic) also belonged to this illustrious family. The members of the royal family at Mithila used to follow the glorious Indian tradition : '*panchāśordhe vanaṁ vrajet*'—one should go to the forest (to be a hermit) when he crosses the age of fifty. As soon as the barber would point out to a king in the family, that his hair was turning grey, the sage-king (*rājarshi*) would accept his grey hairs as 'God's messengers', asking him to renounce the world. Then the barber would be rewarded.

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*When Gautama left Kapilavastu, searching for supreme truth, Yaśodharā bewailed that Gautama was not like his ancestor Mahasudarsana who always took his wife even to the forest. (Asvaghosa, 8.62)

Bodhisattva, as King Nemi (541), had a question in his mind : should he continue to be philanthropic or renounce the world. When a god (*deva*) appeared to him, the king asked :

> "Most puissant lord of all that breathe
> This question solve for me :
> Holy to live, or alms to give
> Which should more fruitful be."

(Cowell, VI, p. 55)

The god explained how the holy hermits like the *seven sages* received alms, renounced the world, and reached supreme spiritual knowledge, denied to kings, brahmins and kshatriya chiefs who might give alms to the sages and the needy persons. Still, the king was told : "although holy living is more fruitful by far than almsgiving, *yet both these are the thoughts of great men*; do *you be watchful in both*; *give alms and follow virtue.*"

(Cowell, VI, p. 56)

This is indeed the sum and substance of the Bodhisattva doctrine, beautifully summed up in the Sanskrit phrase : *ātmano-mokshārtham jagadhitāya cha*—the purpose of human life is to earn spiritual salvation or *nirvāṇa* for one self *primarily*, and *also* to aid in the benefit of the world. It is very significant that Bodhisattva received this highest truth when he was 'Nemi' ('Nimi' in Pali), which in Sanskrit means the 'edge, circumference or felly of a wheel'. His experience was indeed the limit of the Buddhist doctrine which is symbolised by the *Dharama-chakra*, the wheel of truth and righteousness, round and symmetric, complete and moving. Bodhisattva as Gautama decided to renounce the world to obtain supreme Enlightenment (*bodhi*), and then come back to the world as its saviour, the Buddha.

5

Bodhisattva Through the Ages

Gautama referred to himself as the Buddha, the enlightened, and also as a Bodhisattva, one who is destined to be a Buddha. It occurs frequently in his sayings: 'before my Awakening, and while I was yet merely the Bodhisattva, not a fully self-awakened one'. According to the Hindu terminology, a Bodhisattva is a Rishi, a sage who is striving for spiritual enlightenment, and a Buddha the same person who has reached his goal. The Hindus would call a Rishi an Avatāra, if his life incorporates the unfoldment of a long-term divine purpose. A favourite Hindu concept is the eternal procession of Rishis and Avatāras, *i.e.*, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas through successive epochs of human history.

During his first visit to Kapilavastu after the Enlightenment, the Buddha was requested not to beg publicly in his father's kingdom. He insisted in return to pursue his monastic habits since his true 'lineage' was that of the Rishis. In Mahāpadāna Sutta,[1] he mentioned about his six predecessors, he being the seventh Buddha. The earlier Buddhas had been, like him, 'Bodhisattvas' in successive births and assisted the humanity in its spiritual development. The idea of seven Buddhas or

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[1] Digha Nikaya 2. 2ff.

Sammyag-Buddhas is reminiscent of the age-old Indian concept of Saptarshis or seven rishis which later blossomed into the concept of Avatāra or the divine descent of a noble soul as 'saviour'. We wish to discuss in this chapter how the Rishi-Avatāra concept influenced the immortal Buddha-Bodhisattva concept, and syncretistic ideas developed for centuries to evolve a kind of perennial philosophy.

I

Saptarshi Era

The Rishis founded the tradition of spiritual pursuit through *tapas* or asceticism leading to transcendental experience, the wisdom being eventually disseminated amongst the masses. In the Rishi tradition, spiritual merging with the Brahman or the Absolute is not the end of the mission. The derived wisdom must benefit the entire living world.[2]

In Hindu cosmogony, the Manvantara, or the interval of a Manu, is presided over one group of seven Rishis, the spiritual custodian of the land of seven rivers or saptasindhu. Even after their death, they 'live' above the three Lokas or worlds—namely Bhūr (the earth), Bhuvar (the atmosphere), and Svar (the sky) without merging in the Brahmaloka—the seventh or the highest Loka—and continuously helping and directing the mortals on the earth.[3]

Even though the Harappan civilisation has been claimed to be pre-Vedic by some European scholars,[4] there are unmistakable evidences of its script, language and culture being Vedic.[5] There are seals which depict seven individuals with ritual head-dress standing before a deity in a tree to whom offerings are being made.[6] The seven seers may well be interpreted as seven sages.

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[2] J E. Mitchiner, 'Traditions of the Seven Rishis', Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1982, pp. 312-313.

[3] Mitchiner, Chapter 2.

[4] J. Marshall (edited), Mohanjo-daro and the Indus Civilisation, 3 Volumes, London, 1931.

Ṛgveda eloquently praises the Rishis 'born in former times, medieval and recent and engaged in sacred acts'.[7] In another verse, it says :

> *tam u naḥ purve*
> *pitaro navagvāh saptā viprāso*
> *abhi vājayantaḥ*[8]

'From time immemorial, seven Rishis, our ancestors, have been performing ever-new functions and manifesting the glory of our Lord.'

The seven Rishis constantly refer to the one above, the Absolute: *saptā ṛṣīn para ekam āhuḥ*[9]—beyond the seven Rishis is the one. In the Ṛgveda, the seven Rishis are said to have been seated in their performance of *tapas* : *tapase upaniṣedur.*[10] Mahabharata (12.327.61) mentions the Rishis as *Vedakṛts, Vedavids* and *Vedācāryas.*

Complete lists of the seven Rishis are found only from the Sutras onwards. In one of them, instructions are given for setting up seats (in the ritual) for the seven sages together with Arundhati (the wife of Vasistha), and one for the eighth sage who moved to the Southern India, Agastya:

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[5] S.R. Rao, Decipherment of the Indus Valley Script, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1982.

[6] Marshall, Vol. 1, plate XII, no. 18 and Vol. 3, plate CX VIII, no. 7.

[7] Rv. 6.21.5.

[8] Rv. 6.22.2 navagvāh : one who moves in the sky.

[9] Rv. 10.82.2.

[10] Rv. 10.109.4 sitting for holy discourse of Upaniṣad, the other name of Vedanta or the essence of the Vedas.

"Viśvāmitra, Jamadagni, Bharadvāja, Gautama, Atri, Vasiṣṭḥa and Kaśyapa - these are the seven Rishis.... Between Vasiṣṭḥa and Kaśyapa prepare a seat for Arundhati, and a seat for Agastya in the south."[11] In the Mahabharata and other Puranas, five names apart from Vasiṣṭḥa and Atri are found to be changed, and all the seven linked with Ursa Major stars pointing to the northern pole star: *Dhruba*, the fixed one. The famous astronomer Varahamihira writes :

"At the eastern end is lord Marici, next to him is Vasiṣṭḥa, then comes Angiras, then Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha and then lord Kratu—each in order, beginning at the east; chaste Arundhati has resorted to the excellent muni Vasiṣṭḥa".[12]

The epics and Puranas mention new and additional names of Rishis as Brahma's 'mind-born sons' or *manasaputras* who would not remain indifferent to the world and its miseries.[13]

Atharvaveda speaks of seven Rishis as sitting on the edges of a bowl.[14] This passage is subsequently quoted in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad[15] with a list of the seven Rishis :

Arvāk bilaḥ chamasa ūrdhabudhnaḥ
tasmin yasho nihitam vishwarūpam
tasyāsata ṛṣhyaḥ sapta tīre
vāgasṭami brahmaṇā samvidānā

"There is a bowl[16] with its opening on the side and with its bottom upwards, in which is deposited the glory of all forms; the seven Rishis are seated on its rim".

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[11] Hiranyakeśin Gṛhya Sūtra, 2.8.19.2-7.

[12] Bṛhat-samhitā 13.1-6 Arundhati identified with almost invisible Alcor close to Ursa Major, the sixth staridentified with Vasiṣṭḥa.

[13] Brahmavivarta Purāṇa, 1.8.1 ff, 1.24.1 ff.

[14] Atharvaveda, 10.8.9.

[15] Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 2.2.3-4.

[16] The bowl is the head, site of all knowledge, with two ears, two eyes, two nostrils and the mouth as seven openings. This is compared with Seven Rishis helping in one's communion with the divine consciousness.

In *Mahapadanasutta*, the Buddha clearly mentioned about the (six) earlier sages: *pubbā vagabanto* and thus declared that he was one of the saptarshis. The earlier 'Buddhas' or Rishis mentioned by him are: Vipaśyi, Śikhin, Viśvabhū, Krakuchchhanda, Konnagamana and Kaśyapa. Evidently, Kaśyapa is one of the seven mentioned in the Ṛgveda and Sutra lists. Krakuchchhanda is none but Kratu, the ūrdharetas ascetic in the Puranas.[17] Viśvabhū could represent Bhrigu or Viswamitra. Konnagamana is probably a distortion of Kanva Gotama who travelled eastward from the Saraswati river.[18] Atri is mentioned in the Ṛgveda as a fire-worshipper and therefore might have been known as Śikhin: one with Śikhā, tip of a flame.[19] Vipaśyi is one connected with the river Vipāśā and is therefore most likely to be Vasiṣṭḥa himself.

These names of Rishis or 'Bhagabanto' were definitely quite popular during and after the Buddha's time. Hiuen Tsang (Yuan Chwan) mentioned about the towns of Kaśyapa (near Sravasti), of Krakuchchhanda and of Konnagamana near Kapilavastu.[20] Fa Hien stated that the followers of Devadatta rejected Gautama Buddha and worshipped Kasyapa Buddha near the town of Sravasti.[21] Asoka's inscription upon Nigali Sagar states that he enlarged the stupa of Konagamana[22] (Kanakamuni or Kaṇha-Gotama). Debala Mitra opines[23] that the pillar bearing Asoka's inscription was originally at Gotihawa which is closer to Piprahwa (27°26′N, 83°7′E) which according to her was the original site of Kapilavastu. The Buddha mentioned to Ānanda, while walking in the Banyan Park near Kapilavastu:

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17. J.E. Mitchiner, pp. 34 & 96.
18. Śatapatha Brāhmana, 1.4.1.10-20 ; 11.4.3.20.
19. In Nimi Jataka, Cowell, VI, 55, we find some names of the sages such as Kassapa, Angirasa, Akitti, etc. The last one could be a a distortion of 'Atri'.
20. Debala Mitra, p. 248.
21. J.E. Jennings, The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha, p. lix.
22. J.E. Jennings, p. 449.
23. Debala Mitra, p. 252.

"I was born here as Kaṇha".[24] On the basis of such clear evidences, Edward J. Thomas concludes: "The concept of previous Buddhas (*mahāpurusha*) was established by Asoka's time.... The theory of a Great Man is undoubtedly originally non-Buddhist".[25] One can submit even firmer conclusion that the concept was one of Ṛgvedic Rishi, to blossom as something like Puranic *Avatāra*.

The Buddha not only mentioned about his six predecessors, but also referred to the eighth Buddha who was to follow him: Metteya or Maitreya, the one personifying love. In the *Cakkavattisihanada Sutta* of Digha Nikya, he is reported to have mentioned how there would be gradual decay of moral values and how these would be restored by Maitreya. He repeated his prophecy to Ānanda in his death-bed,[26] adding: "I am not the first Buddha who came upon earth, nor shall I be the last." When his disciple Sariputra praised him as the 'grandest' Buddha, the teacher merely reminded him[27]: "thou knowest not the hearts of the holy Buddhas of the *past* nor the hearts of those of the *future*."

It is said that Mahakasyapa, the Buddha's disciple and successor, 'waited' for Maitreya in Kukkutapāda giri, the triple-peaked hill near Kurkihar, Gaya, 'to hand over the charge of the Dharma and monk's robe of Buddha' to him. Bronze-cast image of Maitreya has been discovered from Kurkihar.[28] Eight beautiful bronze images of the six predecessors of the Buddha, and of his successor Maitreya have been discovered in Sopara (District Thana, Maharashtra).[29]

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[24] Kaṇha Jataka (440). Was this Kaṇha muni Kapila of Sāṁkhya fame and founder of Kapilavastu ?

[25] Edward J. Thomas, The Life of Buddha, p. 218.

[26] Mahaparinirvana Suttanta, V. 1-14; Carus, p. 196.

[27] Mahaparinirvana Suttanta, I, 19, 22; Carus, p. 179.

[28] Debala Mitra,

[29] Debala Mitra, p. 189.

It is evident from the Master's statement to Sariputra,[27] that he believed in the Buddhas of the past and the future. When he referred to himself as the seventh, he was merely alluding to the Saptarshi concept of the Aryans, to whom he belonged. At a later stage, however, the Theravada or the Hinayana school of Buddhists remembered Gautama as the *only* Buddha, and tended to disown the original idea of *many* Buddhas. Gautama became the only Buddha, the only prophet, like the Christ and the Muhammad. The idea of multiplicity of the Buddhas was ascribed to the later-day Mahayana movement. *Nothing could be further from the truth.* The truth is that the idea of multiplicity of *mahāpurusha* or great souls existed in the original Pali canon itself. In the introduction to the translation of the Mahapadana Sutta, which gives the idea of a succession of Buddhas in the Master's own words, T.W. Rhys Davids strangely refers to this concept as 'the root of spreading *weed* which finally led to the downfall of the *ancient* Buddhistic faith'. Eventually, 'the doctrine of Bodhisattva drove out the doctrine of the Aryan Path. A gorgeous hierarchy of mythological wonder-workers filled men's minds'.[30] Parrinder rightly comments that 'this statement is highly debatable.' Far from being a choking weed, the idea of multiplicity of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas was indeed the *original* Aryan tradition of Saptarshis, and nurturing it, the Mahayana movement merely 'saved Buddhism from shipwreck'.[31]

The number of Buddhas was increased from seven to twenty-four in the *Pali* Buddhavamsa text which was a Theravada canon. The Mahayana Sanskrit writers continued the process of multiplying the Buddhas. They hit upon the picturesque phrase: "The Buddhas are like the sands on the banks of the Ganges."[32] Har Dayal comments : "Having made the Buddhas innumerable, the Indian imagination could not go further. It is likely that this idea was suggested by the star lit tropical sky."[33] The Bhāgavata Purāṇa also refers to the number of Avatāras as ten, twenty-four and 'countless like small streams coming from an inexhaustible water-reservoir' (1.3.26).

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[30] T.W. Rhys Davids, Dialogues of the Buddha, part 2, p. 1; Geoffrey Parrinder, Avatar and Incarnation, p. 149.

[31] Har Dayal, The Bodhisattva Doctrine, p. 38; Parrinder, p. 174.

[32] Lalita-vistara, 376.5, 402; Saddharma Pundarika, 238.4.

II

Selfless Bodhisattva

For several centuries after the demise of Buddha, his followers fiercely debated on two issues: the 'divinity' of the Bodhisattva and the 'immortality' of the Buddha. The newly emerging Mahayana cult relied heavily on the Vedic and Puranic traditions to develop these ideas under the umbrella of Buddhism.

The Bodhisattva doctrine was 'promulgated by some Buddhist leaders as a protest against the lack of true spiritual fervour and altruism among the monks of that period'.[34] For a few centuries after the demise of the Teacher, the Theravada monks cherished the ideal of the lone Arhat or spiritual aspirant in the image of the Dhammapada message in Attavagga (no. 166) :

'*Attadattham paratthena bahunāpi na hāpaye* —let no one neglect his own task for the sake of another's, howsoever great'. The founders of the Mahayana movement called this a lesser ideal or vehicle, and the label 'Hinayana' used by them was in turn bitterly resented by the Theravadins. The Mahayana followers recalled the original message of the Buddha :

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33. Har Dayal, p. 25.
34. Har Dayal, p. 3.

'*Caratha bhikkhave cārikaṁ bahu-jana-hitāya bahu-jana-sukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya deva manussānam.*"[35] To spend one's life for the welfare and liberation of the multitude was the nobler ideal; nobler than self-realisation is selfless service for others. The Mahayana definition of 'Bodhisattva' became 'one who strove to gain *Bodhi* and scorned *nirvāṇa* to help and succour his fellow creatures'. He is a *satvan*, 'a strong or valiant man, hero, warrior'.[36] This new concept of Bodhisattva was proposed on the historical premise that the Buddha's goal was not merely self-realisation but also removal of the misery of the world, and that after Enlightenment, he resisted the temptation of remaining immersed in his divine *nirvikalpa samādhi* or coummunion with the Absolute. Thus, even as a Bodhisattva he was nobler than an ordinary Arhat.

The Mahayana theorists could further quote the Master's statement in Ariyapariyesaṇā-sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya that some disciples, like lotuses barely reaching the water-level, could not reach the highest intellectual level of altruism.

The hero, Bodhisattva, takes the vow :

"I shall not enter into final *nirvāṇa* before all beings have been liberated. I must lead all beings to liberation. I will stay here till the end, even for the sake of one living soul." [37],[38]

In the Bodhicharyāvatāra, Śāntideva, the seventh century theologian, 'adopts the very original plan of subordinating the virtue of meditation to the active virtues of charity, humility of patience; according to him, sacrificing ourselves for our neighbour purges the mind of error (*moha*) better than *selfish* meditation pursued for its own sake'.[39]

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[35] Vinaya, i, 21.

[36] Har Dayal, pp. 4-9.

[37] Lankāvatāra-sūtra, 66.6.

[38] Śikshā-samuccaya, Santideva, 14.8.

[39] L. de la Vallee Poussin in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics—edited by James Hastings, pp. 739-753.

The growth of *saviour* Bodhisattva concept reminds us of a similar trend in the epic ages of the Hindus. We have already mentioned how the list of Saptarshis or seven sages changed from the vedic to the puranic or epic literature. The names in the later list are those of Brahmā's favourites or mind-born sons: mānasa-putras.[40] Why Brahmādecided to have *new* mind-born sons is explained in Brahmavaivarta Purāna: Brahmā lamented to Nārada that his earlier sons (Rishis) remained absorbed in the supreme reality, and neglected their other divine task, namely, to help the miserable world.[41] Thus, the Mahayana Buddhists merely fell back to the original Aryan concept of superiority of altruism over self-centred ascetism—a point upheld by the Master himself in his crusade against selfishness.

III

Immortal Buddha

The Vajjian monks Vaiśāli who caused the first dissension in the Buddhist Order during the Second Council, founded the group of Mahāsanghikas, comprising monks as well as lay people, and propagated the theory that Bodhisattva was *not an ordinary* Arhat or spiritual aspirant They further proposed that the Buddha is '*lokottara*' or 'superior to the world'. This Lokottaravada or supramundane attribute to the Buddha, though discouraged by the Master himself, was first nurtured by his direct disciples. Therefore, the Theraveda accusation that this was a Mahayana invention is totally unfounded.

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[40] Mahābhārata, 12.201.2-5; Harivamśa, 1. 29-30.

[41] Brahm-vaivarta Purāna, 1.8.1 ff., 1.24.1. ff.

We may recall that when Ānanda asked whether a shrine could be made to honour the Buddha, the Master replied 'not a body-shrine in my life-time'. So only a Bo-tree sapling was used as a token of venerating the Buddha.[42] Yet, the disciples deified their Master and bowed down to 'those blessed feet that were glorious as full-blown lotus flowers, and bore imprinted on the sole the wheel'.[43] Sariputra refuted Yamaka's belief that Tathagata does not exist after the destruction of his body,[44] and the nun Khema told[45] the king, Prasenjit, that 'freed from the designation of body, a Tathagata is deep, immeasurable and unfathomable as the ocean'.

Thus, the Lokottarvadin assertion[46] that a Buddha can 'live' for many aeons or kalpas is neither heretical nor original. The Master is himself quoted to say, in response to a question as to what exists after the death, that, *sabbham atthi*[47] or *sarvam asti*, *i.e.*, everything or the essence exists. Yet, the Sarvāstivādins were declared as heretics during the Third Buddhist Council held during Asoka's reign under the Presidentship of the Theravadin monk, Moggaliputta Tissa. The Sarvāstivādin monks led by Mahadeva fled to Kashmir where some synthesis between Buddhism and Saivism was attempted.[48]

Ever since the Second Buddhist Council, reformist revolts were waged against the Theravada tradition of self-centred asceticism. Mahavastu and Lalitavistara were the first murmurings of this new thought, which blossomed into Mahayana Buddhism around the first century A.D. Its first formal text *Saddharma-puṇḍarika* boldly proclaimed that the Buddha is immortal: *sadā sthitaḥ*.[49] The Buddha was made to re-appear (like Christ's resurrection) and pronounce[50]: "I was not completely extinct at the time (parinirvāna); it was but a device of mine, monks; *repeatedly am I born*[51] in the world of the living". While Vallée Poussin compares[52] Buddha's bodies with Krishna's glorified bodies (avatāra in Bhagavadgita), Har Dayal does not agree that illusory creation (upāya-kauśalya) of phantom Buddha body (nirmāna) is tantamount to the descent of an avatara. Parrinder argues that there is an important difference between the succession of Buddhas and the Hindu succession of Avatars because Gautama never said 'I was that Buddha'.[53] While this argument has some merit, we cannot ignore what has been stated in *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*:

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[42] Kālinga-bodhi Jātaka (479).

[43] Varna Jataka (71) ; Cowell I, 172.

[44] E.J. Thomas, p. 189.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] Mahavastu, 3.226.

[47] Samyutta-nikāya, 4.15.

[48] N. Dutt, Mahayana Buddhism, pp. 9-15.

> 'All Buddhas are one'[54]
>
> 'I was that Buddha of the past, named Vipaśyin.'[55]

These statements considered along with the famous statement in Saddharma-pundarika cited earlier[50]: 'repeatedly am I born', clearly shows that the Mahayana movement went very close to the Bhagavad-gita concept of re-incarnation or Avatara-hood. However, the Mahayanists had to develop their theological concept of Trikāya to explain how the different Buddhas could be viewed as 'one' Here again, they had to come back to the ancestral Ṛgvedic and epic-age concept, as we would see later. It would be helpful at this stage to review the growth of the Hindu concept of re-incarnation or 'Avatāra'.

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[49] Saddharma Punḍarika, 319.1, 323.7, 326.2.

[50] Saddharma Punḍarika, 15.7; Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 21, p. 308.

[51] Compare 'sambhabāmi yuge yuge' in Gita, 4.8.

[52] L. de la Vallee Poussin, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, 1906, p. 960 quoted by Har Dayal, p. 328.

[53] G. Parrinder, Avatar and Incarnation, p. 161.

[54] Mahāyāna-sutrālankāra, 48.11, 83.2.

[55] Mahāyāna-sutrālankāra, 83.1.

IV

The Avatāra Concept

Ṛgveda contains many references to the spiritually gifted sages or Rishis—a group called Saptarshis—and some of them like Vasistha blessed with special experiences of divine revelations. The idea of the Absolute taking special form or manifesting Himself as an Iśwara or divine incarnation grew only in the later epic ages.

Numerous passages in the Ṛgveda explain how the one Absolute divided or manifested himself into manifold forms:

> *Ekam sad viprā bahuḍā vadanty*
> *agnim yaman matarisvānam āhuḥ*[56]

One Absolute speaks as Agni, Yama, the cosmic breath, etc. and then later:

"Purusha is all this, that has been and will be...one quarter (*pāda*) came to be here again"[57]

which is the starting point of theism retaining the primacy of the Absolute concept—*only* a quarter of Himself was manifested into creation. The Upanishads fully developed this theme: *yato jātāni bhuvanāni viśwā*,[58] the entire world was created by Him; *tat tvam asi*,[59] you (the living creature) are that (the divinity); *ātmā bibṛnute tanuṁ svām*,[60] the Absolute reveals his *tanu* or kindly form.

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[56] Ṛgveda, 1.164.46.

[57] Ṛgveda, 10.90.

[58] Svetāsvatara Upanishad, 4.4.

[59] Chandogya Upanishad, 6.1-16.

[60] Mundaka Upanishad, 3.2.3.

Vasiṣṭha was reported to have directly experienced the Absolute in a special form or *tanu*. Whereas 'the other Rishis could not see Indra face to face, Vasistha did so'.[61] Indra was known to assume various forms like a magician: *rūpam rūpam pratirūpo babhūva...Indro māyābhih pururupa īyate....*[62]

Even direct incarnation was hinted in the Ṛgveda, when it was said that Vishnu came in a form clothed with rays (*śipīvista*)[63] and assisted Vasiṣṭha in a battle. The prayer to Vishnu said :

> *mā varpo asmad apa gūha etad yad anyarūpaḥ samithe babhūtha.*[63]

'Please do not conceal your real form (behind your halo); you have been engaging yourself under various forms in your creative function.'

It is significant to note in this connection, that according to the Mahayana tradition, rūpa-kāya (physical body) of Buddha was illusory and unreal like the shapes created by a magician (*nirmāṇa*) adopting special technique (*upāya-kauśalya*).[64] The rūpa-kāya is but a reflection (*bimba*) of the Absolute Reality (*tathatā*) or dharma-kāya.[65] This is very similar to the Ṛgvedic concepts cited before.[62],[63]

The Avatara (re-incarnation) concept found its full expression in Bhagavad-gita and Mahabharata, wherein the hero Vasudeva Kṛṣna (Krishna) was held as the incarnation of the God Vishnu-Nārāyaṇa. Whereas Vishnu, one of the trinity (Brahmā the creator of universe, Vishu the protector and Maheśwara, the destroyer), has been mentioned in the Ṛgveda,

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[61] Taittirīya Samhita, 3.5.2.1.

[62] Ṛgveda, 6.47.18.

[63] Ṛgveda, 7.100.6.

[64] Saddharma-Pundarika, 319.1; Mahāyanā-sūtrālankāra, 46.1.

[65] Aṣṭa-sāhasrikā Prajnā-pāramitā, 307.12; 307.18; 512; Mādhyamika Vrtti, Nagarjuna, pp. 448-9 cited in Mahayana Buddhism by Dutt, p. 171.

Nārāyana seems to be a non-Vedic divinity mentioned for the first time in two passages of Śatapatha Brāhmana.[66] It is claimed that through *pañcarātra-sāttra*, five-day sacrifice of purusamedha (immolation of man ?), Nārāyana gained ascendancy over other Gods. Identification of Nārāyana with the Primeval Man in Puruṣa-sūkta[67] gave birth to the mythical and inseparable relation between Nārāyana—the destination of all narāḥ (men)—and Nara, the Man.[68] The pañcaratra sacrifice mentioned in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa is uniquely non-Vedic in the sense that this *communal* sacrifice dispenses with the need of *purohita* or priest—the performers (yajamānas) themselves acting as sacrificial priests.[68] This was a unique revolt against Brāhmanic domination without a secessionist step as undertaken by the Buddhists.

Nārāyaṇa has been identified with Brahmā in Brahmanda-purana, Manusmriti, etc.[69] Later-day cult of Nārāyaṇa discloses prominent influence of the ascetics. The Mahabharata speaks of Nārāyaṇa as a great yogi and ascetic, engaged in practising penance with his double Nara, who was born as a result of his austerities. He is described as a master of yoga[70] : *yogeśvara.*

Srimad Bhagavata refers[71] to 24 Avatāras reminiscent of 24 Buddhas[72]: the fourth one in the list is Nārāyaṇa who along with Nara appeared as sages. The two brothers were born of the wedlock between Yama and Murti, daughter of King Daksha.[73] Evidently their spirituality established their true identities as divine incarnations.

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[66] Śatapatha Brāhmana, 12.3.4.1f; 13.6.1f ; Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 44, p. 403.

[67] Śatapatha Brāhmana, 13.6.2.12.

[68] Jaiswal, p. 35.

[69] Brahmānda-purāna, 1.4.27; Manusmriti, 1.10.1.

[70] Mahābhārata, 12.209.5, 12.210.17, etc.

[71] Srimad Bhāgavata, 1.3.6-13.

[72] It was 'predicted' that in the Kali age, Buddha shall be born as an Avatāra to 'create confusion amongst anti-God people or atheists', Srimad Bhāgavata, 1.3.24.

[73] Srimad Bhāgavata, 2.7.1-7.

Nārāyana revealed himself to the sage Narada as an ascetic god: 'holding a sacrificial altar, a water-pot (Kamaṇḍalu), a bundle of Kuśa grass, white gems, a deer skin, a wooden staff, and a blazing fire-stick'.[74]

Another sage Markandeya had a divine vision of the two incarnations: Nārāyaṇa and Nara, appearing before him as Rishis.[75] When Mārkandeya wanted to see the magical power (māyā) of the great Almighty, whose incarnations the two brothers were, he had the wonderful vision of a divine child incorporating the entire universe.[76]

It is reported in the Mahābhārata that Nārāyaṇa and Nara were re-born as Krishna and Arjuna respectively for re-establishing spiritual order (*dharma*) in this world. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord Krishna informs his mate Arjuna, that both of them had been born many times: *bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni taba cha*..., and whereas the Lord remembered all the past lives, Arjuna did not.[77]

Then appear the famous verses enunciating the purpose of divine re-incarnation:

"Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, then I incarnate Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age."[78]

Avatāra means 'descent' or 'one who has descended'. The Divine comes down to the earthly plane to raise it to a higher status.[79] It is significant that the Buddha himself hinted at this divine phenomenon: "Know Vasettha, that from time to time a Tathāgata is born into this world, a fully enlightened one,... a blessed Buddha. He proclaims the truth both in its letter and in its spirit.... A higher life doth he make known in all its purity and in all its perfectness."[80] Both an Avatāra and a Buddha are *śāśvatadharmagoptā*,[81] the undying guardian of the eternal cosmic and spiritual law known as *ṛta* or *dharma*. It matters little that the Buddha did not specifically use the word 'Avatāra' for himself and other Buddhas. The spiritual ancestry of the Buddha and Lord Krishna were the same. Whereas Gautama Buddha submitted that he was merely following the ancient Aryan path: *Ārya-māgga*, Bhagavad Gita is claimed to be the 'milk from the Upanishada-cows': *sarvopanishada-gābadogdhā*. These facts were appreciated by the Mahayana movement but ignored by the Theravadins.

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[74] Mahābhārata, 12.326.9.
[75] Srimad Bhāgavata, 12.8.32-38.
[76] Srimad Bhāgavata, 12.9.1-6 and 12.9.14-26.
[77] Bhāgavad Gita, 4.5.
[78] Bhāgavad Gita, 4.7 and 4.8.

Some scholars tend to put the age of the Gitā in the post-Buddha period,[82] and 'reasonably conclude that Bhagavad Gita was composed (under) the growing impact of Buddhism, besides that of the Upanishads'.[83] These views regarding the age of, and the influence of Buddhism on, Gita seem to be erroneous. Gita must have been in existence, more or less in the present form, before the Buddha's era.[84-86] The confusion has arisen because Gita has been considered to be an integral part of Mahabharata, part of which contains some later-day additions referring to the Buddha. The first list of incarnations

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79. S. Radhakrishnan: The Bhagavadgita, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963, p. 155.
80. Tevijja Sutta, Digha Nikaya, 1.250.
81. Bhagavad Gita, 11.18.
82. N. Ayiaswami Sastri in '2500 years of Buddhism', p. 300.
83. K.N. Upadhyaya, Early Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita, p. 29.
84. R.G. Bhandarkar, Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Minor Religions Systems, p. 13.
85. S. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita, p. 14; Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, p. 524.
86. Swami Vireswarananda, Brahma Sūtras, Introduction, p. ix.

in the Mahabharata mentions only one human Avatara, *viz*., Krishna, and neither Rama nor Buddha.[87] Bhagavad Gita does not contain any reference to the Buddha. Panini (500 B.C.) mentions about Vasudeva-Krishna in his Sutra 4.3.98: '*Vāsudevārjunābhyām vun*'. At any rate, the age of Vasudeva-Krishna must have been much earlier than that of the Buddha, since the latter clearly mentions about Vasudeva in the Ghata Jataka. Megasthenes testifies that "this Herakles (Hrishikesh= Vasudev) is held in special honour by Sourasenoi, an Indian tribe who possesses two large cities, Mathora and Cleisobora...."[88] Thus the Vasudeva cult cannot be post-Buddhistic. It is possible that the memorised verses of Gita were recorded around fifth century B.C. or somewhat earlier.

V

Trikāya Syncretism in the Mahayana Movement

The Bhagavata or Vasudeva cult and the Sarvāstivada cult of the Buddhists entered into an unique age of syncretism, the latter receiving more influence from the former, and thus getting aligned towards the source of Buddhism, *viz*., Upanishadic and epic traditions. Let us illustrate this phenomenon by citing some facts strangely ignored by the scholars who sought to 'prove' that Buddhism influenced Bhagavata cult of Gita and not the other way round.

Sarvāstivadins, driven away from the East during and after the Third Buddhist Council under Asoka, moved towards Panjab and Kashmir. They composed the first systematic biography of the Master, *Lalita-vistara*, in mixed Sanskrit, which speaks eloquently of the influence of the grammarian Panini who had reformed the Sanskrit language. *Lalita-vistara* refers to the Buddha as an incarnation of Nārāyaṇa-Vishnu, which 'indicates first signs of a *rapprochement* between Buddhism and Vaisnavism'.[89] In this 2nd century B.C. text, the Buddha is repeatedly mentioned as *Nārāyaṇa-sthamavan*,[90] one with the strength of Narayana, as *Nārāyaṇa*[91] and Mahānārāyaṇa.[92] The name Nārāyaṇa occurs in other Mahayana Buddhist works also.[93,94] These references cited by Jaiswal[89] were strangely missed or ignored by other workers.[31,83]

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[87] Mahabharata, 12.337.36.

[88] Megasthenes quoted in J.W. MacCrindle's 'Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian', Calcutta, 1926, p. 206.

Mrs. Jaiswal's apt observations deserve to be quoted in detail :

"The syncretistic character of the doctrine of incarnation is nowhere so well illustrated as in the case of the Buddha. .. Brahmanical views had infiltrated Buddhism.... Aśvaghosa, Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asanga and Vasubandhu were Brahmanas by birth.

"The popular mind identified the Buddha, the saviour with Nārāyaṇa. The identification of the Buddha with Nārāyaṇa was not the result of a clever machination on the part of the Brahmanas to absorb Buddhism, but rather a movement rooted in those social conditions which had mitigated the difference between Brahmanism and Buddhism, and developed Mahayana Buddhism."[95]

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89. S. Jaiswal, The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism, Delhi, 1967, p. 25.
90. Lalitavistara, Ed. S. Lefmann, 2 Vols., Halle, 1902-08. Tr. Rajendralal Mitra, Bibliotheca Indica, 1886, Chap. 7, pp. 109-110; Chap. 15, p. 234; Chap, 20, p. 291.
91. Lalitavistara, Chap. 15, p. 202; Chap. 21, p. 211.
92. Lalitavistara, Chap. 15, p. 229.
93. Avadānaśataka, Chap. I, p. 129.
94. Saddharma-Pundarika, Chap. 23; SBE, Vol, 21, p. 397.
95. Jaiswal, pp. 130-131.

A very significant point is that two hundred years before Christ, the Buddha was equated with Nārāyaṇa who, according to an *earlier* claim, had re-incarnated himself as Vasudeva-Krishna. Thus the question of Buddhist thoughts influencing the author of Gita cannot arise. The Sarvāstivadins merely brought Buddhism, the child, closer to its mother, Hinduism.

For quite some time, other Buddhists did not like the idea of equating Buddha with Nārāyaṇa. Theravadins resented the growth of this 'detestable weed', namely, the alien Vaisnava concept of incarnation. On the other hand, Vaisnavas also disliked the suggestion that the founder of a heretical sect should be proclaimed as an incarnation of their own god. Bhagavata Purana sought to wriggle out of this awkward situation by noting that the Buddha was born 'to mislead the asuras by preaching wrong doctrines and to bring their downfall'.[96] Sarvāstivadins must therefore be congratulated for their heroic efforts, against heavy odds, to synthesise apparently diverse religious traditions, and bring about, what Aldous Huxley calls, a 'perennial philosophy' for mankind.

There was a real psychological need for ideological synthesis in the Buddhist society. This arose—specially in the minds of the Sarvāstivadins, who were the forerunners of the Mahayana thought—on account of the vacuum created by the demise of their saviour. The Buddha preached 'the doctrine of evanescence and decay' from which his own body, *Kāya*, was not exempted. After his demise, the Kāya of the saviour had to survive in some form so as to save the world.

When a monk Vakkali, on his death-bed, became very eager to see the Master in person, the Buddha came and asked him not to be eagar to see his *putikāya* (body of impure matter) since his 'real' body was *dharma* or the eternal truth :

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[96] Srimad Bhagavata, 1.3.24.

"*Alam Vakkali Kim te pūtikāyena diṭṭhena.*
Yo Kho Vikkali dhammam passati so mam passati."[97]

Thus, the Theravadins learnt to distinguish between the Buddha's *rūpa-kāya* or *nirmaṇa-kāya* (human manifestation) and his *dharma-kāya* (cosmic or spiritual body). The Sarvāstivadins also believed in this *dvi-kāya* (two categories of body) theory with the exception that whereas the Theravadins believed that 'the Buddha had really passed away',[98] the Sarvāstivadins granted the possibility of the Buddha's appearance in the world of men for *lokānuvartana*—to follow the ways of the world.[99]

Once the Buddha was identified with *dharma-kāya*, the Absolute, or the cosmic or spiritual principle—which is one or *advaita* (non-dual)—it followed that *all the* past, present and future *Buddhas are one* (see earlier discussion in this chapter and references 51, 54 and 55). Therefore the notion of one Absolute *dharma-kāya* creating many phantom bodies or *rūpa-kāya* through special method (*upāya-kauśalya*) became inescapable.[100] Since, the *rūpa-kāyas* are *historically real*, and not mere 'phantom bodies'—Gautama Buddha really existed on the surface of the earth like Christ and Ramakrishna—the difference between the 'Dvikāya' and 'Avatāra' concept is hardly of any substance.[101]

It was not certain when the next Buddha, Maitreya, would appear to the mankind in his *rūpa-kāya*, and the Absolute

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[97] Samyutta, III, p. 120; Majjhima, I, pp. 190-191 cited by Dutt, p. 145.

[98] The Questions of King Milinda, 4.1.1-18; SBE, Vol. 35, pp. 144-154.

[99] Mahāvastu, I, pp. 168, 170 cited by Dutt, p. 149.

[100] Saddharma-Pundarika, 319. 1; Mahayana Sutralankara, 46. 1.

[101] Early Vaisnava/Purana scriptures use the words *sambhava*, *srjana*, *prādurbhava*, etc., instead of *Avatāra*. Similarly, a Bharhut sculpture depicts the Buddha's descent from the Tushita heaven with the statement : *bhagavato ukramti*—the descent of the Lord. Even the word Avatara is subtly used in Lankavatara, Bodhicharyavatara, etc.

Brahman or dharma-kāya of the Buddha was so far away. So a particular school in the Mahayana movement namely Yogāchāra sect invented the concept of *third kāya* of Buddha (Sva—or Para—) *Sambhoga-kāya*. According to this concept, Bodhisattvas, after attaining enlightenment, adopt this Buddha-body to preach the doctrines to the junior Bodhisattvas, and at the same time to arouse in their minds joy, delight and love for the excellent dharma.[102] This Buddha-body is visible only to the faithful Boddhisattvas, who assemble to hear a Buddha preach. The *sambhoga-kāya* concept was added in the Mahayana movement after Nagarjuna,[103] 'to give the Buddhas something like the celestial bodies of the Hindu devas'.[104] Dutt gives a beautiful summary :

> "The conception of the Svasambhogakāya shows a tendency of the Yogācāra school to posit something like the Īśvara of the Upanishads behind the phenomenal universe. The Dharmakāya corresponds to the impersonal Absolute of the Vedanta, the Brahman, and the Sambhogakāya to the Īśvara, when Brahman assumes name and form. Every Buddha, it should, however, be noted, has his own Sambhogakāya, but all Buddhas have one Dharmakāya."[105]

Lankāvatāra, an important yogachara school text of the 4th Century A.D., went so far as to assert that different names, *e.g.*, Visnu, Īśvara, Kapila, Rama, Vyasa, Tathatā, etc., indicate the different aspects of Sakyamuni Buddha.[106] The idea of the Buddha being the Supreme Reality manifesting Himself in so many names and forms became explicit enough.

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[102] Pancavimśati-sāhasrikā Prajnāparamita : Sambhogika-kāyah cited by Dutt, p. 164; Mahayana Sutralankara, 45.1, 188.6, 189.1.

[103] Nagarjuna proclaimed that *rūpa-kāya* was unreal, being a *bimba*, mirror-image of the only real entity, *dharma-kāya*. Thus, he had no need of a *sambhoga-kāya*. Vide his *Madhyamikavrṭṭi*.

[104] Har Dayal, p. 27.

[105] Dutt, p. 167.

[106] Lankāvatāra-sutra, pp. 192-193.

In the Saddharma-pundarika and other subsequent Mahayana texts, Bodhisattva Gods were conceived : those who had reached the highest Truth or Buddhahood and yet continued as an Īśvara or Hindu deva in their *Sambhoga-kāya* to help the suffering humanity. Some such *divine* Bodhisattvas were known as Maitreya, Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara (amongst many others) personifying maitrī (friendliness), prajñā (wisdom) and karuṇā (mercy), respectively. The Buddhists had waited long enough for the eighth Buddha, Maitreya, to appear on this earth with this rūpa-kāya. Ultimately he was personified as a divine Bodhisattva. The name *Mañjuśrī* might have been derived from *manju-ghosa* and *manju-svara,* two epithets to describe Buddha's voice.[107] What the *bhaktas* or the Buddhist devotees needed most was divine compassion. Thus, Avalokiteśvara (one who looks down from on high), the Bodhisattva of compassion, mercy or Karuṇā became the most important Buddhist deva-entity or deity. Even in the earliest texts of Mahayana Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara is eulogized.[108] It is said that any one uttering the words : *Namo-namas tasmai abhayamdada avalokiteśvarāya bodhisattvāya mahāsattvāya*, would be saved from all calamities of ship-wreck, fire or moral impurity, as this Bodhisattva would take the forms of the beings he is to save, *e.g.*, of a man to save men, and deliver them from all troubles. This divine Bodhisattva or the particular sambhoga-kāya of Buddha was considered to represent the *essence* of the saviour Buddha, and therefore in no way inferior, in utilitarian terms, to the Absolute dharma-kāya of Buddha. The Īśvara-like quality of the Buddha was loudly proclaimed in Lankāvatāra-sutra by making him utter :

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[107] Lalita-vistara, 366.19, Mahā-vastu, 2.323.14 quoted by Har Dayal, p. 36; also see Saddharma-pundarika, Chap. 11.

[108] Saddharma-pundarika, Chapters 24 and 29. In *Kārandavyūha*, even Brahmā, Nārāyana and Saraswati are said to have originated from Avalokiteśvara, who alone can nullify the old law of *Karma*, and who is to be worshipped with the *mantra* : *Om maṇipadme hūm.* Vide Har Dayal, pp. 48-49.

"I shall not enter into final Nirvana before all beings have been liberated. I must lead all beings to liberation I will stay here till the end, even for the sake of one living soul."[109]

It is claimed that the Theravadins did not originally conceive the Buddha in such devotion-inspiring attitude of self-denial and sacrifice, and adopted the Mahayana idea *later*, by incorporating the *Dūrenidāna* story of Brāhman Sumedhā resolving to be a saviour Buddha, in the original canon.[110]

VI

On the Bhakti Cult in the Mahāyāna Movement

Har Dayal strangely concluded, in an otherwise original treatment of the Bodhisattva doctrine, that 'the Buddhism originated the idea of *bhakti* and did not borrow it from Hinduism.'[111] He based his agrument on the fact that the word *saddhā* (=sraddhā or respectful veneration) occurs in the earliest canons. He also mentioned the occurrence of the names Visnu and Śiva as secondary deities, Venhu and Īśāna respectively in the Digha Nikaya.[112] But these facts merely indicate the Hindu origin of Buddhism. While the Buddha emphasized more on Vedantic reason than on faith, the Mahayana movement was clearly influenced by the Bhagavad Gita.

It is quite evident that Gita went far beyond the Mahayana concept of 'faith' while asserting the universality of religion :

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[109] Lankāvātara-sūtra, 212 trs. D.T. Suzuki, 1932, p. 227.

[110] Dutt, p. 135.

[111] Har Dayal, p. 33, also pp. 31-35.

[112] Digha Nikaya, 2.259. Mahāsamaya-sutta.

"Whatever form any devotee with faith wishes to worship, I (the Lord) make that faith of his steady."[113] It may be safely presumed that Buddhism developed into theistic Mahayanism as a result of the dominating religious fervour of theistic Hinduism.[114] M. Winternitz wrote :

"It was under the influence of the *bhakti* doctrine of the Bhagavadgita ... that the Mahayana Buddhism was developed."[115] It is suprising that Har Dayal reached his conclusion, as stated before, even after faithfully quoting other scholars such as Winternitz, Kern, Senart, Saunders, and de la Vallée Poussin, all of whom had vindicated the role of Bhagavata cult in influencing the *bhakti* cult of the Mahayana movement.[116]

Nevertheless, Har Dayal is in total disagreement with T.W. Rhys Davids who had considered the idea of the successive Buddhas in the Mahāpadāna Sutta (given by the Master himself), leading to the Bodhisattva doctrine, to be 'spreading weeds'. Har Dayal admirably argues :

"The competition of the rival Indian sects and movements led the Buddhists to advance new claims on behalf of their leader.... It would have been impossible for the Buddhists to succeed in their ethical propaganda, if they had adhered to their old doctrine that the survival of a Buddha after death was an 'unexplained question' (*avyāḳṛta*) or that a monk perished altogether at death after attaining *nirvāṇa*.... The Buddhist leaders, who inaugurated the Mahayana movement, *saved Buddhism from shipwreck by popularising it and inventing compassionate Bodhisattvas as Buddhist counterparts of the Hindu deities and their incarnations.*"[117]

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113. Bhagavadgita, 7.21.
114. R. Kimura, Hinayana and Mahayana, p. 43, and S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, I, p. 583.
115. M. Winternitz, 'Problems', quoted by Har Dayal, p. 63.
116. Har Dayal, p. 31.
117. Har Dayal, p. 28 and p. 38.

VII

The Buddha as a Hindu Avatāra

The Mahayana movement was deeply influenced by the *Bhakti* and *Avatara* cult of the Hindus specially outlined in the Bhagavad Gita. In turn, it produced intellectual giants like Nagarjuna (2nd Century A.D.), Chandrakirti (6th Century), Śantideva (7th Century) of the Mādhyamika school and Maitreya (3rd Century), Asanga, Vasubandhu (4th Century), Dharmapala, Dharmakirti (7th Century), Śantarakṣita, Kamalaśila (8th Century) and lastly Atiśa Dipankar (10th Century A.D.) who combined *jñāna* (philosophical wisdom) with *bhakti* (devotion), and definitely contributed to the growth of neo-Advaitism as propounded by Gaudapāda and Śankara, etc.[118]

While the Mahayana leaders were the first to equate their Master with Nārāyaṇa, the traditional Hindus did not lag behind to appreciate the divine character of the Buddha. Gradually, they came to accept the Buddha as one of the divine incarnations.

The Nāṛāyaṇia section of the Mahabharata gives two lists of incarnations: the first mentions four names, only one of them (Krishna) in human form,[119] and the second lists six names with Rama-Bhargava (Paraśurām) and Rama-Dasarathi (son of Daśaratha) being mentioned as the additional incarnations.[120]

Bhagavatapurana was probably the first Hindu sacred text to mention Buddha as an incarnation, though with a disgruntled tone: the Buddha is stated to have descended to mislead Asuras or atheists by false doctrine! (1.3.24)

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[118] Some observations on this syncretism between the Hindu and Buddhist thoughts are made in Chapter 7 in this book.

[119] Mahabharata, 12.337.36.

[120] Mahabharata, 12.326.72f; also vide Jaiswal, p. 120.

Gauḍapāda, the first historic philosopher of the system of neo-Vedanta, and propounder of its *advaita* or non-dualistic aspect, was the teacher of Govindapāda, who in turn taught the famous Śaṇkara. There is great controversy about Śaṇkara's date of birth: [121] end of sixth century A.D. (Telang), 680 A.D. (R.G. Bhandarkar), 788 A.D. (Max Muller and Macdonell) etc. According to the last view, Śaṅkara died in 820 A.D.

Some Western scholars claim that Gauḍapāda was originally a Buddhist saint, and his salutation in Māṇḍūkya Karika (4.1) is addressed to the Buddha[122]:

'jñeyābhinnena saṁbuddhaḥ taṁ
bande dvipadām varaṁ'

Swami Prabhavananda however refutes this view, and suggests that Gauḍapāda invoked Nārāyaṇa who appeared before him in human form in the Badarikāśrama hermitage.[123]

Nevertheless, it is highly probable that Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara were indebted to the Madhyamika *śūnyavāda* school of Nāgārjuna and his followers regarding their formulation of neo-Vedantic thoughts. Śaṅkara extolled Buddha's personality in superlative terms:

Ya āste kalau Yogināṁ chakravarti
Sa Buddhaḥ prabuddhostu mat chittavarti

"Let the great saint Buddha, the great *Yogi* in the *Kaliyuga* shine in my heart."

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[121] S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 447.

[122] 2500 Years of Buddhism. p. 310.

[123] Swami Prabhavananda, The Spiritual Heritage of India, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1977, pp. 273-274, Bhagavata Purana records (12.8.32-38) sage Markandeya's divine vision of Nara and Nārāyana.

This tribute from the great philosopher Śaṅkara firmly established Buddha as a divinity in the Hindu world, even though certain conservative elements branded Śaṅkara's thoughts as 'pseudo-Buddhist'.

Śankara further rationalised *avatāra* (descent) of a liberated soul as a work of pity 'in fulfilment of a mission (adhikāra): the *return* is in the nature of a visit and not habitation'.[124] In recent times, Sri Rāmakrishna has clearly explained that certain privileged and liberated souls—*Iśvarakoti* and *Avatāras*—incarnate themselves or *descend* on the earth as human beings, to relieve the society of misery.[125]

A large number of Purāṇas or the Hindu scriptures of post-Buddha era describe the Master as an Incarnation or *Avatāra* of the Supreme. He was often identified with Vāsudeva or Krishna. A few exhortations may be cited :

> *'Namo Buddhāya Śuddhaya, namaste jñānarūpine'*[126]

Salutation to Buddha, the serene, the source of all knowlege.

> *'Vāsudeva punar Buddha ....*
> *Devādinām rakshanāya, adharmma haraṇāya ca'*[127]

Vāsudeva was born again as Buddha to protect the virtuous and to remove unrighteousness. Next we record the famous *daśāvatāra* statement :

> 'Dharmma saṁrakshanārthāya adharmādi vinaṣṭaye
> Dwaitya rākshasanāśārtha matsya pūrbe yathābhavat
> Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛhari, Vāmana, Rāma urjita
> Tathā dāśarathi Rāma, Krishna, *Buddhẏayo* Kalkyapi"

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[124] Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 644.

[125] The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 7th Edn., Madras, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 237; Vol. 2, pp. 562-563.

[126] Kurma Purana, 6.15.10-48.

[127] Garuḍa Purāṇa, 1.149.39 ; see also Bhāṣkara Purāṇa, 3.8.19 and Matsya Purāṇa, 47.249.
Vāyu Purāṇa exhorts (3.24-27 & 80) the pilgrims to the Vishnu temple at Gaya to salute the Aśwattha tree and Bodhisattva at Bodh-Gaya also.

'For protection of righteousness and destruction of unrighteousness, fish, tortoise, pig, man-lion, dwarf Brahmin, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, and *then Buddha* appeared as *Avataras* ; so would be Kalki.'[128]

In the *Gītagovinda-aṣṭapadī*, Jayadeva, the court-poet of Lakṣaṇsena, referred to the Buddha as an Avatāra, reincarnation of Keśava or Krishna :

> nindasi yagñavidher ahaha Śrutijātam
> sadaya-hṛdaya, darśita paśughātain,
> *Keśava-dhṛta Buddha-śarīra*
> jaya Jagadiśa hare[129]

'Victory to you, O Hari, O Kesava, who *in the body of the kind-hearted Buddha* denounced the sacrificial slaughter of cattles.'

It is clear, therefore, that the early Puranas (200-500 A.D.) like Matsya, Visnu, and middle Puranas (500-1000 A.D.)[130] like Bhagavata, Kurma and Garuda were clear and sincere in their syncretistic efforts to assimilate the Buddha-cult in the mainstream of Hindu thoughts. The twelfth century exhortation of Jayadeva is the culminating recognition of Hinduism's greatest rebel son, the Buddha. Notwithstanding the cynical comments of some fanatical Hindu conservatives, who thought that Hinduism killed Buddhism in India through an apparently friendly hug (*i.e.*, accepting the divinity of the Buddha), and the bitter animosity of the Southern Theravada (or Hinayana) Buddhists against Mahayana efforts to synthesise Śaiva and Buddhist traditions, Hindu India by far and large accepted the Buddha as its own noble son.

A concrete archaeological support to this theory has been recently obtained. The famous Jagannātha temple at Puri,

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[128] Garuda Purāṇa, 86.9.61.

[129] Gitagovinda by Jayadeva, 1.9.

[130] J.E. Mitchiner has suggested the dates : Tradition of the Seven Ṛṣis, p. xviii.

Orissa, was 'known' to have mediocre standard of sculpture. A 19th century archaeologist, Rajendra Lal Mitra, suggested that this temple whose construction was completed in 1197 A.D., was later plastered to hide or protect the delicate sculptural masterpieces. This theory has been recently corroborated. Now we can witness the sculptures of ten Avatāras including that of the Buddha, the ninth Avatara of Vishnu. This is the convincing proof of the unequivocal acceptance of the Buddha as a Hindu Avatara.* The image of the Buddha is *worshipped* all over the Buddhist world in essentially a *Hindu* way to stimulate not only meditation but also *bhakti* or reverence for an *Avatāra.*

VIII

Some Authoritative Views on the Incarnations such as the Buddha

Śaṅkara, the great reformer of Hinduism, was the champion of non-dualistic Vedantism, and yet accepted the role of Īśvaras, special forms of the Absolute and *Apāntaratamas* or *Rishis* re-incarnating themselves. The riddle he faced was that whereas Vedanta and the Buddha refer to *nirvikalpa samādhi* or the final merger of the saint's ego into the Supreme Absolute, how do thus-enlightened 'souls' come back on the earth, or even live after their attainment of *nirvikalpa samādhi.* Śaṅkara solved this riddle by saying that some can come down or 'descend' to perform a special task :

Yāvad—adhikāram avasthitiḥ ādhikārikāṇām (Brahma Sutra 3.3 32). Śaṅkara adds:

Brahmavidām api Keṣāmcid itihāsa—purāṇayor dehāntarotpatti-darśanāt

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*Sri Ramakrishna 'believed that the Incarnation of Buddha continued to be manifest in the image at Puri' ('The Great Master', Volume 1, p. 340). Poet Saraladasa of Orissa wrote, "I pay my humble respects to the Incarnation of Buddha who dwells in the Nilachala, Puri" (quoted by Eliot in 'Hinduism & Buddhism', Volume 2, p. 114).

"Of those who have a certain office (task), there is subsistence (of the body) as long as the office lasts.... It may be that some great Rishis had attached their minds to other cognitions ...and later on they fix their minds on the highest self, whereby they obtain their final release."[131]

Thus, Śaṅkara reconciled the Vedantic and Buddhist concept of liberation through enlightenment (bodhi or jnana) with the possibility of *Apāntaratamas* or noble souls re-incarnating themselves. He disagreed with other Vedantic schools (*purvapakshin*) who did not equate enlightenment with final release.[131]

Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna are widely considered to be amongst the greatest Hindu saints ever born. The Swami's Buddha-like personality and some of his utterances on the Buddha shall be discussed in the next two chapters. It would be fitting in this chapter to quote Sri Ramakrishna's views on the theory of Incarnations and on the Buddha as an Incarnation. Ramakrishna's statements recorded in the Gospel[132] are not only authoritative but also beautifully replete with lucid imageries on subjects which are difficult and abstruse.

The Absolute, Brahman, which encompasses *everything*—the created and the uncreated, the living and non-living, and the Creator without form, as well as with name and form (*Īśvara*) is beautifully described :

"Brahman may be compared to an infinite ocean, without beginning or end. Just as through intense cold, some portions of the ocean freeze into ice and the formless water appears to have form, so, through the intense love of the devotee, Brahman appears to take on form and personality *for the sake of the bhaktas*[133].... But the form melts away again as the sun of knowledge rises. Then the universe also disappears, and there is seen to be nothing but Brahman, the infinite."[134]

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[131] Śankarācharya, Vedanta Sūtra, 3.3.32. Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 38, pp. 235-236. The concept is similar to an enlightened Bodhisattva deferring his final merger with the Absolute to help this world.

[132] The Gospel recorded by M, is, in Aldous Huxley's words, 'a book unique in the literature of hagiography; no other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell', Gospel, Foreword, Vol. 1, p. v.

Thus, Īśvara is a form of the Absolute, the one ultimate, the Brahman, and not the other way round. This is the beautiful Hindu synthesis of deistic thoughts under the supreme umbrella of monism or non-dualism. Similarly, Incarnations or Avatāras have been described as the manifestations of the Absolute, and not the other way round :

"The waves belong to the river; does the river belong to the waves?"[135]

The Buddhists like the Vedantists follow the path of *jñāna* or knowledge rather than *bhakti*, and therefore do not accept the Absolute as Īśvara or God with form or as any human Incarnation.

"Vedanta does not recognize the Incarnation of God....The Incarnation of God is accepted by those who follow the path of *bhakti*."[136]

Even Śaṅkara, a staunch Vedantist, composed hymns towards Īśvaras with different names and forms. Though the Buddha never recommended *bhakti*, the Mahayanists extolled him to a near-God stature. Today all Buddhists *worship* the Buddha and yet disagree with the Hindu theory of Incarnation !

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[133] Gospel, Vol. 1, p. 217.

[134] *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 802.

[135] *Ibid.*, p. 640.

[136] *Ibid.*, Vol 1, p. 308.

Sri Ramakrishna provides some useful definitions :
"He who liberates others is an Incarnation of God."

The scriptures speak of ten, of twenty-four, and *also* of innumerable Incarnations.[137]

"An Incarnation of God *or* one born with *some* of the characteristics of an Incarnation is called an *Iśvarakoti*. An ordinary man is called a jiva or *jivakoti*, who can realize God, but after *samādhi* cannot come back to the plane of relative consciousness."[138]

"A *jivakoti* is like a petty officer. He can enter some of the rooms of the palace; that is his limit. The *Iśvarakoti* is like the King's son. He has the keys to all the rooms of the seven-storey palace; he can climb to all the seven floors and come down at will."[139]

"The ego of the Incarnations and other Īśvarakotis is like the wall with a hole. Though they remain on this side of the wall, still they can see the endless meadow on the other side. That is to say, though they have a human body, they are always united with God.... Though established in Samādhi, they can again descend to the worldly plane."[140]

The idea of an Incarnation or Īśvarakoti or a Buddha capable of regaining his identity even after communion with the Absolute (*nirvikalpa samādhi*) is crucially important. Sri Ramakrishna emphatically asserted the above view :

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137. *Ibid.*, Vol 2, p. 850. Thus the 'number' of Incarnations is a matter of insignificant theological debate. An Incarnation like the Buddha might not accept, out of modesty, that they came to 'liberate others.'

138. *Ibid.*, Vol 2, p. 749.

139. *Ibid.*, pp. 749-750. A jivakoti is an Arhat in the Buddhist terminology and an Iśvarakoti a Bodhisattva God.

140. *Ibid.*, p. 760.

"Everybody says that no one can return from the plane of Samādhi. In that case, how do you account for sages like Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja ? They retained the 'ego of knowledge' or 'the ego of devotion.' "[141]

The Buddha was born in the way of the *descent* of a noble soul (bodhisattva) with a sense of pre-destination and later remained alive in the human society, in body and spirit, long after his spiritual enlightenment or *nirvāṇa*, when he could merge himself with the Absolute; if legends are to be believed, he also ascended to the heavens and later 'descended' at Sankassya during his lifetime. Thus, he clearly fulfilled the criteria of an Īśvarakoti capable of re-incarnating himself at his will.[142]

Though an Incarnation is part (*aṁsa*) of the Absolute, yet the two are 'identical' as beautifully illustrated by Sri Ramakrishna :

"We see God Himself if we but see His Incarnation. To say, 'I have seen and touched the Ganges', it is not necessary for one to touch the whole length of the river from Hardwar to Gangasagar (laughter)."

"However great and infinite God may be, His Essence *can and does* manifest itself through man by His mere will.... The essential thing about a cow is her milk, which comes through the udder. The Divine Incarnation is like the udder. God incarnates Himself as man from time to time in order to teach people devotion and divine love."[143]

Lastly, we quote Sri Ramakrishna's considered opinion about the Buddha :

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[141] *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 767.

[142] It would be suggested in the next chapter that the Buddha did re-incarnate himself as Swami Vivekananda.

[143] Gospel, Vol. 2, pp. 725-726.

"I have heard a great deal about Buddha. He is one of the ten Incarnations of God"[144] (24th May, 1884) and later on 21st April, 1886 :

"Buddha is an Incarnation of God. How can you compare him to anybody else? As he is great, so too is his teaching great."[145]

These are the final pronouncements of the Hindu acceptance of the Buddha's Avatārahood—in the words of the great Incarnation of our time, Sri Ramakrishna, who was well aware of the Vedantic (as well as Buddhistic) objection to the theory of Incarnations. He told Swami Vivekananda in his deathbed :

"He who was Rama and Krishna is now, in this body, Ramakrishna—but not in *your* Vedantic sense."[146]

The famous scholar, Swami Ranganathananda of the Ramakrishna Order, has drawn attention to the expression 'your Vedantic sense', *viz* , the spiritual path of negation emphasizing *māyā* or *śūnya* of this illusory world :

"Advaita Vedanta accepts Avatāra; so does Śaṅkarāchāryya. Only the *jñāna mārga* or the *neti neti* path of Advaita Vedanta does not find any need for an Avatāra."[147]

Very recently, in the twentieth century, another great saint, Sri Aurobindo, has written on Avatars (Incarnations) and the Buddha as an Avatar :

"Surely for the earth-consciousness the very fact that the Divine manifests himself is the greatest of all splendours....

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[144] Gospel, Vol. 1, p. 430. Also note his other statements on the Buddha cited in this book, Chapter 3.

[145] *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 964.

[146] *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 72.

[147] Swami Ranganathananda in his private communication to the author dated 1st September, 1983.

Avatarhood would have little meaning if it were not connected with the evolution.

"The Hindu procession of the ten Avatars is itself, as it were, a parable of evolution. First the Fish Avatar, then the amphibious animal between land and water, then the land animal, then the Man-Lion Avatar, bridging man and animal, then man as dwarf, small and undeveloped but containing in himself the godhead.... Krishna, Buddha and Kalki depict the last three stages, the stages of the spiritual development.... If Buddha taught something different from Krishna (*neti neti* instead of *iti iti*), that does not prevent his advent from being necessary in the spiritual evolution.... If a Divine Consciousness and Force descended, and through the personality we call Buddha did a great work for the world, then Buddha can be called an Avatar."[148]

IX

Was the Buddha Reborn ?

The Pali texts do not refer to the Buddha's resurrection. As a matter of fact, Gautama Buddha is quoted to have said that it was his last birth, since he had reached *nirvāṇa.* But the Mahayana argument could be easily based on his statement in Saṁkharuppatti Sutta (Anupada vagga of Majjhima Nikaya) that there is the possibility of the re-birth of an individual according as *he* directs his mind. What is the proof that the Buddha did not want to be re-born to redeem this world ? In fact, Saddharma-pundarika makes the spirit of the Buddha utter :

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[148] Sri Aurobindo, Collected Works, Birth Centenary Publication, Pondicherry, 1970, Vol. 22 ('The Purpose of Avatarhood'), pp. 401-405.

"I was not completely extinct at that time; it was but a device of mine, monks; repeatedly am I born in the world of the living."[149]

The Buddha according to the Pali text predicted the emergence of the next Buddha: Metteya or Maitreya, the personification of love, who would restore the spiritual morals in a degenerating society.[150] He repeated this prophecy about 'the next incomparable leader of men, a master of angels and mortals'.[151]

May we venture to suggest that this 'Maitreya' was none but Jesus Christ, the apostle of love and *bhakti* to the supreme God. There is every likelihood that Jesus Christ was partly indebted to the Buddhist traditions for his spiritual inspiration. Certain facts may by submitted for consideration of the readers.

The Assalayana Suttanta refers to the land of the Yonas or Greeks having only two varṇas : the Arya and the Dāsa (slave). Thus there seems to have been concourse of ideas between the Indians and Greeks as early as sixth century B.C. It is a well-known fact that after the third Buddhist Council held at Pataliputra, Buddhist missionaries were sent to Antiochos II of Syria, Antigonos of Gonatos of Macedonia, etc., as mentioned in the second and thirteenth rock edicts of Asoka.[152] It is also stated that the Yona (Greek) bhikku named Dhammarakkhịta was deputed to the Aparāntaka country to preach the Dhamma there.[152] By the time Menander or Menandros (of Milinda-panha or Questions of Milinda fame) became a ruler in

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149. Saddharma-pundarika, 15.7; also Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 21, p 308.
150. Cakkavattisihanada-Sutta in Digha Nikaya, Chap. 11; See also Mahapadana Sutta.
151. The Mahaparinirvana Suttanta; Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 11; Carus, pp. 195-196.
152. 2500 Years of Buddhism, p. 173.

N.W. India and Afghanistan during the first century B.C., Buddhism was firmly entrenched in Western Asia and Greek islands. Swami Vivekananda had a remarkable vision[153] during his boat journey near Crete that the origins of Christianity took place in that area through the teachings of the Buddhist sects of Therapeutae (=thera putra=the disciples of the monks) and Essene (=Issai=the holy men obeying natural law or dharma, according to the Greek root of the word). Excavations in Crete after the Swami's death unearthed corroborative evidences.[154] During 1947-1949, discoveries were made of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumrān caves near the Dead Sea and within 40 kms. of Jerusalem.[155] The Qumrān manuscript 'The Manual of Discipline' (reminiscent of the Pali *Vinaya*) has been clearly identified to belong to the *monastic* Essene community which, according to Josephus, arose during the middle of the second century B.C., and the tenets of which differed from those of the other Jewish communities, *viz.*, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.[156]

References by Josephus[156] as well as by Philo of Alexandria[157] and Pliny the Elder[158] graphically describe the community of Essaei (from 'hosio' or 'saintly'; many Indian literatures refer Jesus Christ as Īśā Mosi=Moses or the prophet of the Essaei) as one of monks, 'living without women', 'its race perpetuated, kept up, renewed day by day though no one born in it'.[158] Josephus describes the community as practising celibacy, recommending one year's trial (*brahmacharyya*) for a novice, embracing truth, non-violence, socialistic and democratic way of monk-life, engaged in prayers before sun-rise, believing in fate (or Karma) and the other-world and immortality of soul.[156] This community was distinctly Buddhistic, though by birth the monks were Jewish.

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[153] Sister Nivedita, The Master as I Saw Him, 6th Edition, 1948, pp. 280-282.

[154] The Life of Swami Vivekananda, by Eastern and Western Disciples, Fifth Edition, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 160.

[155] A. Powell Davies, 'The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls', Mentor Book, New York, 1960.

[156] Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, and Wars of the Jews, written 69-94 A.D. quoted by A. Powell Davies, p. 64 and appendix.

[157] Philo of Alexandria in Quod Omnis Probus Liber, written Circa 20 A.D. quoted by Powell Davies.

[158] Pliny the Elder (Circa 70 A.D.) in Historica Naturalis, Book 5, Chap 17 quoted by Powell Davies.

John the Baptist and Jesus Christ were Essenes whose Hindu-Buddhist spiritual thought-seed sprouted in the Jewish soil and Hellenic environment to give rise to the beautiful tree of Christianity.[159] The tradition of celibacy amongst the early Christians was neither Hellenic (Greek), nor Egyptian, nor Judaic—it was essentially Hindu-Buddhistic.

Luke says that the Christ 'was in the deserts till the day of his showing in Israel' (Luke, 1,80) which clearly demonstrates that sixteen years of Jesus Christ's life (13-29) were spent outside Israel. These years are fully accounted in a Buddhist manuscript discovered in the Himis monastery in Ladakh by the noted Russian traveller Nicholas Notovitch, and later authenticated by the archaeologist Prof. Roerich and Swami Abhedananda of the Ramakrishna Mission.[160]

The remarkable manuscript opens with the statements from the merchants coming from Israel immediately after Jesus Christ's crucifixion :

"The earth trembled and the heavens wept, because of the great crime committed in the land of the Israel. For there was tortured and murdered the great and just Issa, in whom was manifest the soul of the universe—which had *incarnated* in a simple mortal, to benefit men and destroy the evil spirit in them."[161]

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[159] Romain Rolland, The Life of Vivekananda and Universal Gospel, Advaita Ashrama, 1947, pp. 382-422 : notes on Hellenic-Christian mysticism, theory of re-incarnation by Plotinus in Enneades, and Hindu mysticism.

[160] The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ, Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta (1890 document reprinted) 1981. Introduction by Swami Prajnanananda, pp. vii-xii.

Then the narrative proceeds to describe the fourteen-year-old Issa's (Jesus Christ) travel to Sind, India, his stay at Puri of Jagannath fame, protest against the prevalent caste-system, and learning of the Buddhistic scriptures in Pali and Sanskrit, at Puri, Rajagriha, Varanasi, etc. Very significantly, Sister Nivedita recorded that 'Swami Vivekananda thought perhaps that the beautiful sayings of Jesus might really have been uttered by the Buddha'.[162]

All Incarnations have shared the Buddha's intense love for humanity and the downtrodden : Rama and Krishna before him, and Christ, Muhammad, Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna after him. But the saint who has resembled the Buddha's personality most is Swami Vivekananda. It is submitted that the Buddha's spirit was re-incarnated in Swami Vivekananda. Certain striking resemblances between the two great spiritual personalities shall be brought out in the next chapter on Vivekananda Jataka.

The readers may legitimately ask, whether the Buddha and Swami Vivekananda were indeed the identical person ? The Buddha's answer to this question would be 'yes and no'. He would point out that the person who asks a question is not the same who receives the answer a few moments later. The entire universe including the living world is in constant flux. The Buddha after receiving spiritual enlightenment was not the same as the Bodhisattva before enlightenment. Yet, there is an identity. A flame is extinguished and a new flame is lit on the same candle. The two flames are different and *yet the same in essence*. 'Persons can be the same, in the same sense as two flames *of the same kind* are called the same'.[163] In this sense, the divine Bodhisattva or the human Buddha can be said to have re-incarnated Himself in the body of Swami Vivekananda. The life of the great Swami, an Īśvarakoti, who lived in our present twentieth century, has been the latest illustration of the perennial phenomenon : Bodhisattva through the ages.

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[161] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[162] Sister Nivedita, Master as I Saw Him, p. 282 footnote.

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[163] Carus, p. 125 ; also Questions of King Milinda.

6

Vivekananda Jataka

The perennial phenomenon of the Bodhisattva spirit's descent on the human society receives its latest illustration in the holy life of Swami Vivekānanda (1863-1902). The foremost disciple of the Incarnation Sri Rāmakrishna Paramahaṁsa (1836-1886), 'Swamiji' has been hailed as an Īśvarakoti, a liberated soul, by his own teacher. He not only propagated the universal religion of love, tolerance and spirituality as propounded by his teacher, and earned international fame in the 1893 Parliament of Religions at Chicago, but also founded Ramakrishna Math and Mission (1897), which has been rendering unique spiritual and philanthropic service on an international scale.

There exist excellent biographical accounts of Swami Vivekananda; therefore, we need not try to even summarise the vast information on his illustrious life. The purpose of this chapter is merely to highlight the Buddha-like personality of the Swami. The author is fully conscious that the concept of the Buddha having re-incarnated himself as Swami Vivekananda is legendary in nature. But then, are not the accounts about Krishna's and Christ's lives legendary in many respects? Are these legends about their lives not glorious and spiritually inspiring? The author is not the first to believe and propagate that the Buddha came back as the 'cyclonic monk', Swami Vivekananda.[1]

When Swami Vivekananda, formerly Narendranath Dutta of Calcutta, met his teacher for the first time in Dakshineswar, the latter exclaimed to the young disciple in private : "I know, my lord, you are that ancient Rishi Nara, a part of Nārāyaṇa, who has incarnated himself this time, to remove miseries and sufferings of humanity."[2] This prophetic statement astonished the young Narendra but was later fully vindicated through his glorious spiritual life. The legend of the sages Nara and Narayana, mentioned in the Bhagavata Purana (2.7.1-7 ; 12.8.32-38) has been briefly alluded to in the earlier chapter. Radhakrishnan has aptly commented[3] that "the name Narendranath given to him was not a mere accident. He was the embodiment of *nara*, the human being. '*Nārāyaṇaṁ Narasakhāṁ saraṇam prapadye*'. *Narasakhā* is Nārāyaṇa. He felt the pangs of all human beings". Ramakrishna sometimes called Naren as Narayana.[4]

The Master explained to his other disciples what a great soul Naren was, by narrating one of his mystic visions. One day, Ramakrishna's mind soared through *Samādhi* to the highest world of 'formless Absolute', where even deities were afraid to enter. There, he 'saw seven wise Rishis having bodies consisting of divine light only. A part of the homogeneous mass of Light crystallised into the form of a Divine Child. Coming down to one of those Rishis...the Divine Child embraced him . . The Rishi woke up at the delicate and loving touch . . . the Divine Child told the Rishi 'I am going down, you must come with me'. The Rishi's loving eyes expressed his hearty assent....' "Hardly had I seen Narendra for the first time", said Ramakrishna, "when I knew that he was the Rishi".[5]

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[1] This would be illustrated through several references to be made in this chapter. Some of the useful Bengali references are yet to be translated into English. In the Vivekananda Centenary volume of the Bengali periodical 'Udbdhan', Dr Sacchidananda Dhar wrote "Swamiji seems to be an incarnation of the Buddha. They are indistinguishable and identical," Paush, 1370 (B.S.), pp. 314-318.

[2] Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master—Swami Saradananda (English Translation), Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 5th Edition, 1979, Vol. 2, p. 825.

[3] Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, Calcutta, 1963, p. ix. Lecture on 20.1.1963.

[4] Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, conversation between 'M' and Swamiji on 9.4.1887, Vol. 2, p. 985.

Thus, Swami Vivekananda was identified as one of the Saptarshis, as *Nararūpī Nārāyaṇa*—Narayana in a human form—who descended with the Divine Child, the Incarnation Ramakrishna, to help the suffering humanity. Swamiji was also called Vīreśwara, an Incarnation of Lord Shiva. Swami Shivananda (1856-1934), the second President of Ramakrishna Mission (1922-1934), had a divine vision of Lord Vireswara Shiva lying in the place of young Narendranath at Cossipore, few months before Ramakrishna's passing away.[6]

However, neither Narayana nor Shiva are historical personalities. We have indicated, in the previous chapter, how the Buddha came to be equated with Narayana. Similarly, the Buddha can be identified with Shiva also. Swami Vivekananda opined that Shiva Linga as well as Shalagrama of the Vishnu-worshippers were adapted from the Buddhist memorial Stupas.[7] Sister Nivedita has further commented that 'in the gradual concretising of the Vedic Rudra into the modern Mahadeva, the impress made by Buddha on the national imagination is extraordinarily evident. Stirless meditation, unshadowed knowledge, fathomless pity are now the highest that man can imagine of the soul."[8]

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[5] Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, Vol. 2, p. 846. The Master told that he himself had assumed the form of that Divine Child (See Bhagavata Purana, 12.9.14-26 reference to the Divine Child).

[6] Swami Apurvananda—vide his books: Mahapurush Shivananda, Udbodhan, 1359 (B.S.), p. 56 and Shivananda Vani, 2nd Volume, Udbodhan, 1371 (B.S.), pp. 197-198.

[7] The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Advaita Ashrama, Volume 4, 11th Edition, 1978, pp. 424-425.

Ramakrishna described Narendranath variously as 'Nara Rishi', 'one of the Saptarshis', 'part of Narayana or Mahadeva', but never as the Buddha. As a matter of fact, this was a closely-guarded secret. The Master said "the moment he realizes who he is, he will refuse to stay a moment longer in the body."[9]

Yet, young Narendranath got early hints of who he had been in an earlier life, without understanding the full implication of such spiritual experiences. Sometimes, following meditation, Naren would see his double. It would appear someone just like himself, and he would wonder, "who is this." He told Ramakrishna of it, but the Master passed it over lightly.[10] Once, Naren had a vision of himself, the Buddha!

Before accepting the concept of God with a form, Narendranath meditated on the formless. Intuitively, he followed the Buddhist style of meditation, abandoning all anthropomorphic notions of God. Once, while meditating with his mind as still as the flame of a lamp in a windless place, he saw the extra-ordinary figure of a monk appear suddenly, filling the room with a divine effulgence. "He was in ochre cloth with a Kamandalu in his hand. His face bore such a calm and serene expression of inwardness, born of indifference to all things, that I was amazed and felt much drawn towards him ... very often it comes to my mind that I had the good fortune of seeing the Lord Buddha that day."[11]

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[8] The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita, Volume 4, 1st Edition, 1968, Calcutta, pp. 144-153.

[9] The Life of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Vol. 1, Fifth Edition, 1979, p. 178.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

[11] Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master, pp. 916-917; The Life of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1, p. 113, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 8, p. 278.

It is a very significant fact that while Narendranath was receiving inspiration from his Master, he simultaneously felt attracted to the life of Buddha through the Buddhist literatures such as Edwin Arnold's 'Light of Asia', Rajendralal Mitra's 'Buddhagaya', the famous texts *Prajnā Pāramitā*, *Lalita-vistara* and so on. He and his brother-disciples inscribed upon the wall of the meditation room, the famous line from the last-mentioned text : *Ihāsane śuṣyatu me śarīram....* 'Let this body dry up on its seat; let its flesh and bones dissolve; without attaining the Englightenment which is difficult to achieve even in aeons, this body shall not rise from its seat.'[12] Swamiji used to recite the abovementioned lines even later, frequently to his disciples and admirers.[13] The Buddha's psalm of an itinerant monk : *Gandāra-sutta* in Sutta Nipata was also very dear to him.[14]

'Even as the wind, not caught in the net,
Even as the lotus leaf, unstained by the water,
Do thou wander alone, like the rhinoceros !'

As late as 1900, and far away in France (after Paris Congress), 'the story of Lord Buddha was much in his mind; one finds him reciting passages from the Jatakas, the *Lalita-vistara*, *Upali Prichcha* or the 'Questions of Upali, the Barber', *Dhaniya Sutta* from *Sutta Nipatsa*, etc.[15]

During 1885-1886, Swamiji led the discussions on Buddha and Buddhism in the circle of Ramakrishna's disciples. This climaxed with his visit to Buddha Gaya in April 1886 and discussions on Buddha with his Master.[16]

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12. Life, Vol. 1, p. 172.
13. Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 3rd Edition, p. 67, p. 412.
14. Life, Vol. 1, p. 264; Sister Nivedita, The Master as I Saw Him, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta, 6th Edition, 1948, p. 263; Complete Works, Vol. 6, p. 227.
15. Life, Vol. 2, pp. 544-545; The Master as I Saw Him, pp. 264-267.
16. Life, Vol. 1, pp. 172-176; Vide Chapter 3 references and Chapter 5 references 144 and 145 in this book.

While meditating at Buddha Gaya, he had a vision of the sublime character of the Buddha, his wonderful compassion, his humane teachings, and the subsequent history of India transformed by the magic wand of Buddhism.[17] Swamiji inherited the Buddha's power of concentration and deep meditation, and reached *Nirvikalpa Samādhi* before the passing away of his Master; later also, he reached Samadhi at least three times.[18] There are some wonderful descriptions about his Buddha-like meditative postures.

After attaining *Nirvāṇa*, the Buddha was in divine bliss and walked in a trance for seven days circling the Bodhi-tree; this is known as *Chankramana* or *Sankramana*. Swamiji's younger brother, Mahendranath, once found Swamiji (in Baranagar Math. 1887) in a similar deeply meditative walking posture, completely oblivious of his surroundings.[19] Mary C. Funke described how once in the Thousand Island Park, U.S A. (on the 7th of August, 1895), Swamiji gathered his disciples in the open, and saying 'Now we will meditate; we shall be like Buddha under the Bo-tree', 'seemed to turn to bronze, so still was he. A thunderstorm came up and it poured. He never noticed it. Completely absorbed in his meditation, he was oblivious of everything.'[20]

After attaining *Nirvāṇa*, the Buddha wanted to remain immersed in this blissful experience. But the heavenly deities (or his inner conscience?) asked him to turn back to the society, and to use his divine knowledge to save the suffering mankind.[21] Similarly, the turning point in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement came about when Swamiji wanted to remain absorbed in *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*. His Master reprimanded: "You are a small-minded person. There is a state higher even than that. It is you who sing the song: 'All that exists are Thou.' "[22] "I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, you will do great things in the world, bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor."[23]

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[17] Life, Vol. 1, p. 173.

[18] Life, Vol. 1, pp. 177-179.

[19] Mahendranath Dutta's reminiscences : *Swamijir jibaner ghatanābalī*, Vol. 1, 3rd Edition, Calcutta, pp. 58-62.

[20] Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, p. 256.

[21] Carus, p. 37.

'As Naren's work was to be in the form of compassion and service to humanity, he could not remain in *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*, if he was to do it. The Master had no intention of permitting him to stay there. He prayed that the Divine Mother may keep this realization of the Absolute veiled from Naren.'[24]

Thus, the Buddha in Swamiji came down from the ivory tower of divine bliss, and moved into the grander ecstasy of compassion for the suffering humanity. To us, the turn of the event has been grand, but to Swamiji, compassion meant identification, and he suffered constantly, thinking of the suffering humanity. Like the Buddha, his sole thought, during his life as a wandering monk, was how to redeem the humanity of its manifold suffering. To illustrate this point, Swami Turiyānanda, a *gurubhai* or brother-disciple of Swami Vivekananda, has narrated a couple of deeply touching incidents.

Few days before Swamiji's departure for the U.S A. in May 1893, Turiyananda met him at Abu Road Station, when Swamiji confided to him : "I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion." Then with an expression of deep sorrow on his countenance and intense emotion shaking his body, he placed his hand on his chest and added, "But my heart has expanded very much and I have learnt to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed." His voice was choked with feeling; he could say no more. Tears rolled down his cheeks.

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22. Life, Vol. 1, p. 162.
23. The Life of Ramakrishna by Ronain Rolland, Advaita Ashrama, 4th impression, 1947, p. 268.
24. Life, Vol. 1, p. 179. Radhakrishnan has commented that this episode took place 'as in the life of the Buddha'.

While narrating this incident later, Swami Turiyananda was also overcome; with a deep sigh he said, "can you imagine what passed through my mind on hearing the Swami speak thus ? 'Are not these', I thought 'the very words and feelings of Buddha?' ... I could clearly perceive that the sufferings of humanity were pulsating in the heart of Swamiji: his heart was a huge cauldron in which the sufferings of mankind were being made into a healing balm."[25]

On another occasion, Swami Turiyananda found Swamiji walking alone on the verandah of a Calcutta house, tears rolling down his cheeks and uttering to himself : "Oh, nobody understands my sorrow ! No one but the sufferer knows the pangs of sorrow." It soon flashed upon Turiyananda's mind that Swamiji's mood reflected his tremendous universal sympathy with the suffering and oppressed.[26]

In a letter sent to Alasinga from the U.S.A. on August 20, 1893, Swamiji wrote:

"The Lord once more came to you as Buddha and taught you *how to feel, how to sympathize with the poor, the miserable, the sinner*, but you heard him not." Referring to the italicized portion of his statement, Swamiji's biographers have commented: 'When the Swami wrote this letter, was not the compassion and enlightenment of the Buddha once more finding its way into the national consciousness of India through his words? Was not the *same* spirit that worked through the Buddha now working through the Swami?'[27]

To many of those who saw and heard Swamiji from a close distance, he appeared to resemble the Buddha. Sir Jamshedji Tata, who had travelled with Swamiji in 1893 up to Japan, narrated to Sister Nivedita that in Japan, everyone who saw Swamiji was immediately struck by his likeness to the Buddha.[28] Ela Wheeler Wilcox, a famous American lady poet, wrote in May 1895: "I have heard Swami Vivekananda's lecture to day morning for an hour. I believe he is an Incarnation of a great soul—either of the Buddha or of the Christ."[29] Swami Atulananda, an American monk heard Swamiji on 10.11.1899, and wrote in his book 'With the Swamis in America' about his impressions: "What a giant, what strength, what manliness, what a personality!...What was it that gave Swamiji this distinction ?...I could not analyse it. I remembered what had been said of Lord Buddha, 'a lion amongst men.'"[30]

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[25] Life, Vol. 1, p. 388.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 389.

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 526-527.

As soon as Swamiji returned to Calcutta in 1897, after his first triumphant tour of the West, he started his Mission in the name of Ramakrishna, his Master, and yet with his own Buddha-like style. 'The day after his return, he held a meeting of his brother-monks, telling them that they must now be prepared to go forth, *as the followers of the Buddha did*, and preach the gospel of Shri Ramakrishna to the people of India.'[31]

Earlier he had sent his clarion call to one of his lady-disciples, Sister Nivedita: "Who will give the world light? The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many, for the welfare of all. *Buddhas by the hundred* are necessary with eternal love and pity.... Awake, awake, great ones! The world is burning with misery. Can you sleep?"[32] Thus, a year later, when his boys plunged themselves into selfless phil-

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28. Letters of Sister Nivedita, edited by Shankari Prasad Basu, Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta-9, p. 1982, Vol. 2.
29. Viswa-Vivek, Bāk Sahitya, Calcutta, 1963, p. 160.
30. Life, Vol. 2, p. 487.
31. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 426.
32. Letter dt. 7.6.1896. Complete Works, Vol. 7, p. 501; similar statement by the Buddha in Kumbha Jataka (512) and Dhammapada (146).

anthropy as a part of their spiritual *sādhanā*, Swamiji again wrote to Sister Nivedita with great satisfaction:

"For the first time since the days of Buddha, Brahmin boys are found nursing by the bed-side of cholera-stricken pariahs."[33]

Some attempts have been made to compare Swami Vivekananda with Shankaracharyya who unfortunately never recommended, like the Buddha and Swamiji, that Brahmin boys may nurse pariahs. Swamiji himself contrasted Shankara's sharp intellect and not-too-deep liberalism with the Buddha's great heart.[34] As if to illustrate his Buddha-like disapproval of the caste structure and the age-old discrimination against the Sudras, he arranged to distribute sacred threads, normally used by the Brahmins only, to the non-Brahmin devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. This historic incident took place on February 22, 1898, during the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary.[35] The Buddha renewed his grip on the caste-ridden Hindu society, to which he belonged!

Like the Buddha, Swamiji wanted to start an order of nuns: "my duty would not be complete if I die without starting the two places (centres), one for the sannyasins, the other for the women."[36] In his letter to Sister Nivedita dated 29th July, 1897, he observed: 'India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations."[37] Sister Nivedita fulfilled his expectation by becoming a nun in the Order of Ramakrishna. Later, Swamiji's hope fully materialised through the establishment of Sāradā Math, an Order of nuns—autonomous though ideologically linked with the Ramakrishna

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[33] Letter dt. 4.7.1897. Complete Works, Vol. 8, p. 407.

[34] Swāmi-şişya sambād (Bengali), Udbodhan, Vol. 1, 1358, B. S. edition, pp. 134-136; Complete Works, Vol. 6, p. 227.

[35] Swāmi-şişya sambād, Vol. 1, pp. 119-120; Life, Vol. 2, pp. 314-315.

[36] Letter to Mrs. Ole Bull, dt. 25.2.1897. Complete Works, Vol. 6, p. 389.

[37] Complete Works, Vol. 7, p. 511.

Movement—on the 2nd of December, 1954. Pravrājikā Bhārati-prāṇā, the first Head of the Order had seen Swamiji, was one of the students of Sister Nivedita, and initiated by the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna's wife, in 1911 on the day of Buddha Purnima.

As a spiritual leader, Swamiji resembled the Buddha in many ways. He emphasized the rational path of spiritual enquiry and shared the Buddha's abhorrence of wonders and miracle-mongering.[38] He believed in the necessity of rules for an organisation and the greater necessity for spiritually transcending all rules and regulations.[39]

Swamiji had the spiritual insight (like the Buddha) to discover that 'there is but one basis of well-being, social, political, or spiritual—to know that *I and my brother are one.*'[40] He could thus go beyond Shankara's dry neo-Vedantism and ridicule the self-centred spiritual practices for salvation of one's own self only.[41] He even cautioned his disciples: "You will go to hell if you (merely) seek your own salvation."[42]

His advice to his disciples to pray for the welfare of the whole world and to spread the 'wave of love in all directions'[43] is strongly reminiscent of the Buddha, who re-incarnated in his mortal frame. To the monistic philosophy of neo-Vedanta, Swamiji added the compassion and *Karma Yoga* of the Buddha and Ramakrishna's wonderful spirit of *bhakti* in serving the living creatures as Shiva.[44]

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[38] The Master as I Saw Him, p. 356.

[39] Reminiscences of Vivekananda, p. 329.

[40] Complete Works, Vol. 8, p. 350.

[41] Reminiscences of Vivekananda, pp. 320-321.

[42] Life, Volume 2, p. 426.

[43] Swami Śuddhānanda's memoirs in Bengali, Udbodhan 1320 (B.S.) Aṣādh, Complete Works in Bengali, Udbodhan, Vol. 9, 1963, p. 350. Note the Buddha's messages in Digha 1.235; Maitreya Sutta, Sutta Nipata, 5.148.

[44] Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, Vol. 2, pp. 939-941; Life, Vol. 1, pp. 138-140.

Swami Vivekananda's Identity with the Buddha

Swamiji had some faint notions about his previous births and prescience related to the future, even as a young man.[45] Gradually, he developed, through spiritual practices, the wonderful faculties reminiscent of the Buddha: *divyachakshu*, the vision towards the future,[46] and *purvanivāsa jñāna* the knowledge about his previous births. On the latter, he was reticent to divulge what he knew. At least twice, he claimed that he had known about his previous births.[47]

Dhar records[48] that some were 'led to wonder whether he was not Buddha himself in *one more* of his existences on earth, a Bodhisattva'. Sister Nivedita wrote to Mrs. Ole Bull on 15th March, 1899: "The Holy Mother (Ramakrishna's wife) says that my fancy about Swami was exactly what Ramakrishna said to her about him—but I must be very silent about it."[49] Later, Sister Nivedita described her last meeting with the Swami few days before his death in 1902. She wrote: "I stayed two hours almost alone with him. I remember saying to Him that *He was the new Buddha* who was but to appear in the Far East to be recognised and acclaimed. He used to watch me with a quizzical-half-doubting, half believing way and NEVER said he was not."[50]

We should record that Swamiji himself made an admission, in one of his spiritually elevated but unguarded moments, that he had been the Buddha. His brother, Mahendranath Dutta, recorded how in London, Swamiji used to describe the Jataka stories with great delight. With a rarely serene mood he explained, how deep meditation leads one to track back one's previous births.[51] Once, in presence of Mahendranath, Swami Saradananda and Miss Muller, Swamiji said in an exalted mood: "In a previous birth, I was born as the Buddha."[52]

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[45] Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master, Vol. 2, p. 851; Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, p. 180.

[46] Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, p. 188, Vide his remarkable predictions about independence of India and socialism in Russia and China.

[47] Complete Works, Vol. 5, p. 361; Vivekananda Charita (in Bengali) by Satyendranath Mazumdar, Udbodhan, 4th Edition, 1343 (B.S.), p. 537.

[48] A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda by S. N. Dhar, Madras, Vol. 1, p. 17.

[49] Letters of Sister Nivedita, Vol. 1, p. 86.

[50] Letters of Sister Nivedita, Vol. 2, pp. 889-890.

Swamiji arrived at Bodh-Gaya on the morning of his last birthday in 1902. Sister Nivedita described it 'as a fit end to all his wanderings...Bodh-Gaya had also been the first of the holy places he had set out to visit (in 1886).... Here, as afterwards at Benares, the confidence and affection of the orthodox world were brought to him in such measure that he himself stood amazed at the extent of his empire in men's heart.'[53] Swamiji used to visit Buddha Gaya temple daily. 'In the north-western corner of the house, there was an image of Buddha from Japan. The expressions on its face and mode of sitting was much like Swamiji's.[54] The orthodox world in Varanasi hailed him: "you are a great soul-like Buddha and Shankara;"[55] "you are Shiva incarnate."[56] This was the glorious climax of his life which was terminated within a few months after his Varanasi trip in 1902.

The Buddha's Companions

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when Incarnations descend, they bring down on the earth some of their associates, who had appeared with Him on the earth even earlier. Did Yaśodharā re-appear as Sister Nivedita (1867-1911) and

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[51] Mahendranath Dutta, *Londone* Swami Vivekananda (in Bengali), Vol. 3, pp. 51-53.

[52] *Londone* Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1, pp. 22-23.

[53] The Master as I Saw Him, pp. 396-397; Life, Vol. 2, p. 621.

[54] Life, Vol. 2, p. 623.

[55] Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, p. 407.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 399.

Ānanda as Swami Shivananda (1856-1934) ? We wish to place certain facts before the reader.

We have indicated earlier in this chapter,[32] that Swamiji chose to give a clarion call for renunciation specially to Sister Nivedita in 1896. Within a year, the Sister responded and beautifully wrote:

> "If the fancy of Re-incarnation were true, I can only imagine myself coming back to the world to take the most miserable part I could find anywhere."[57]

So great was her fascination for the life of a missionary and for the personality of Swamiji (who, she thought, could marry like a Protestant clergyman) that she actually offered to marry Swamiji and assist him in his glorious work! Swamiji softly replied that he was a Sannyasin.[58] The tender scene of Yaśodharā's ardent love to Gautama was re-enacted. Thereafter, she could conceal her personal love for her teacher only with great difficulty, and utterly failed before the Holy Mother who told her once, "Love Swamiji as much as I used to love my teacher (husband). If one loves a saint, one's soul undergoes a glorious rebirth."[59]

Sister Nivedita recalled Swamiji narrating to her the Yasodhara-Buddha story : 'never have I heard the dry bones of history clothed with such fullness or convincingness of life'. Gautama was to leave Yasodhara. In Swamiji's words 'what was the problem that vexed him ? Why! It was *she* whom he was about to sacrifice for the world! That was the struggle! When Gautama came back after seven years, Yasodhara became

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57. Letters of Sister Nivedita, p. 1255.
58. Nivedita—Fille de l' Inde by Lizelle Reymond, Paris, 1945—translated into Bengali by Narayani Devi, Calcutta, 1362, B.S., pp. 70-71.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227.

his disciple. Then all the pent-up love and pity of those seven years welled forth in the Jataka birth-stories! For they were all for her ! Five hundred times each had forgotten self. And now they would enter into perfection together.'[60] It was the Buddha narrating to Yasodhara their story after twenty-four centuries !

Yasodhara was initiated by the Buddha, and her description is also unique :

"I reached the Math at eight, and went to the Chapel. There we sat on the floor, and till the flowers came for worship, the King (Swamiji) talked to me of Buddha. He said the Jataka birth-stories meant that after giving up his life *for others* 500 times, a man could become the Buddha of the Blessed Vision. ... When I had decorated the shrine with flowers, he said : 'And now give some to my Buddha. No one else here likes him, but me.''[61]

The Yasodhara story was so dear to Sister Nivedita that she wrote a beautiful narrative 'Buddha and Yasodhara', which was published posthumously. Therein we find a touching paragraph :

"Yasodhara also wore the yellow cloth—ever since the morning when she wakened to learn that the prince had abandoned the world and gone to dwell in the forest. ..."[62] Sister Nivedita received her yellow cloth of renunciation from Swamiji himself on 5th November, 1899, at Ridgely, U.S.A. — a fact not so widely known.[63]

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[60] The Master as I Saw Him, pp. 255-257.

[61] Letters of Sister Nivedita, Vol. 1, p. 95. Her Letter to Miss J. Macleod dt. 30.3.1899 written five days after the initiation ceremony; vide also 'The Master as I Saw Him', p. 161 and Life, Vol. 2, pp. 448-449.

[62] Modern Review, October 1919; also Complete Works of Sister Nivedita, Vol. 3, p. 139.

Sister Nivedita used to keep an image of the Buddha in her study-room, and towards the end of her life started worshipping an image of *Prajñā-pāramitā* Buddha.[64] Few days before her death at Darjeeling (October 1911), she had printed and distributed the Buddha's famous exhortation : 'In the East and in the West, in the North, and in the South, let all beings move forward freely, each in his own path, without enemies, without obstacles, overcoming sorrow and attaining cheerfulness.'[65]

Swami Shivānanda (1856-1934), one of the direct disciples of Ramakrishna and the second President of Ramakrishna Mission (1922-1934), was an ardent follower of Swami Vivekananda. Like Swamiji and the Buddha, he was in the early stage of his spiritual career, against worshipping God in any anthropomorphic sense (*i.e.*, with form or body). He accepted God with a form, only in a later stage.[66] Swami Shivananda preferred the Buddhist type of meditation or *dhyāna,* which Swamiji also followed, 'in making the mind still and mere witness in the cosmic void, *śūnya* or *vyoma*'. He unconsciously developed the Buddhist habit of looking down, little ahead of the feet, while walking. He felt that he might have been born as a Buddhist monk in one of his previous lives.[67] With a rare historical and spiritual insight, he commented that the trinity in the famous Jagannath temple at Puri originally represented *Dharma* (the cosmic principle), Buddha and *Sangha* (organisation) according to the Buddhist tradition. To us in the modern era, 'Ramakrishna represents Dharma, Holy Mother the Organisation and *Swamiji the Buddha.*'[68]

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[63] Vide ref. 58, pp. 315-317; Letters of Sister Nivedita, Vol. 1, p. 233: "Swamiji gave two pieces of cotton cloth—gerua colour—to Mrs. Ole Bull and to me. He called her a *Sannyasini* and putting one hand on her head and one on mine, he said, 'I give you all that Ramakrishna Paramahansa gave to me. What came to us from a Woman (Goddess Kali), I give to you two women.' " Later the Holy Mother told Sister Nivedita that she had a vision of the Sister in *gerua* (ochre) robe. Letter dt. Sept. 8, 1904, Vol. 2, p. 677.

[64] Bhaginī Niveditā (in Bengali) by Pravrājikā Muktiprānā, 2nd Edition, 1963, Calcutta, p. 467.

[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 474-475.

[66] 'Mahapurush Shivananda' by Swami Apurvananda, Udbodhan, 2nd Edition, 1356 B.S., p. 57; 'Shivananda Vani' by Swami Apurvananda, Vol. 1, Udbodhan, 5th Edition, 1386 B.S., pp. 170-171.

Swami Shivananda lost his power of speech in a cerebral stroke on 25th April, 1933 (he passed away on 20th February, 1934); for the early part of this year, he used to have many divine visions—his mind soaring to *saptarṣi mandal* and other *divyaloka*. One morning in March 1933, while he was in his bed and 3-4 attendants were present in the room, he was found sobbing. Latter he told Swami Gangeshananda and others :

"Swami Vivekananda appeared before me. What a radiant divine appearance ! He told me, 'Tārakdā, do you recall that it was I who was born as the Buddha and you as Ānanda ? Now, come back to the higher world.' "[69]

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[67] 'Shivānanda Mahārājer Anudhyān' by Mahendranath Dutta, Calcutta, 1388 B.S., pp. 41-43.

[68] Mahapurush Shivananda, p. 239.

[69] Shivananda Smriti—samgraha (in Bengali) or Reminiscences of Swami Shivananda, compiled by Swami Apurvananda, 1st Edition, 1377 B.S., Barasat, West Bengal, Volume 3, pp. 463-465.

Swami Shivananda's previous name was Taraknath Ghoshal. Since he was senior by birth, Swami Vivekananda used to call him as 'Tarakda'.

The three-volume Bengali compilation contains reminiscences from many authors. The particular essay referred to, was published as anonymous. Swami Apurvananda, the compiler, and Head of the Varanasi Centre of the Ramakrishna Order wrote to the author on 21st November, 1975, that he himself was the author of the anonymous essay, and happened to be one of the witnesses in the March 1933 incident, hearing Swami Shivananda directly.

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The Pledge and the Exhortation

In the *Bhāgavad Gītā*, the Lord assures us that He shall reincarnate Himself repeatedly, to save the mankind : *'sambhavāmi yuge yuge'*. The Buddha gave a similar promise, at least according to the Mahayana tradition. The Buddha's compassionate spirit has renewed his eternal pledge through Swami Vivekananda :

"May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls.[70]

"Even if a thousand births have to be taken in order to relieve the sorrows of the world, surely I will take them. What avails it all to have only one's own liberation ?[71]

"So long as even one individual lives in this world without gaining liberation, I do not want my own liberation."[72]

The eternal pledge of the Buddha has ever been coupled with his eternal call to men to adopt similar Bodhisattva vows and reach Buddha-hood themselves. To him, Buddha is *not a person but a state*, the emphasis being on a succession of persons eternally helping each other on their way to *Nirvāṇa.*

Thus it is fitting that the Buddha as Swami Vivekananda exhorted us to become selfless and compassionate Bodhisattvas :

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In his letter dated 1st January, 1948, he approved the idea of disseminating the deeply held belief about the previous births of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Shivananda.

[70] Complete Works, Vol. 5, p. 137—letter to Miss Mary Hale dated 9th July, 1897.

[71] Complete Works, Vol. 6, p. 502—conversation with Girish Chandra Ghosh in 1897.

[72] Reminiscences of Vivekananda, p. 326.

"Seek the salvation of others if you want to reach the Highest ! Kill out the desire for personal Mukti ! This is the greatest of all spiritual disciplines.[73]

"Great men are those who build highways for others with their heart's blood. This has been taken place through eternity, that one builds a bridge by laying down his own body, and thousands of others cross the river through its help ! *Ebamastu, ebamastu, Shivoham, Shivoham*—Be it so, be it so, I am Shiva ! I am Shiva."[74]

In Swami Vivekananda's life, we indeed witness the eternal story of Bodhisattva and Buddha unfolding itself in the modern age.

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[73] Life, Volume 2, p. 426.

[74] Complete Works, Vol. 6, pp. 273-274; letter to his brother-monks dated 25th September, 1894. This is reminiscent of the Buddha's message in Mahākapi Jataka (407)—vide Appendix IX in this book.

7

Buddha and Bodhisattva—A Total Appraisal

We wish to highlight in this last chapter of the book, the impact of the Buddha-Bodhisattva phenomenon on the world of human ideas. The viewpoint adopted in our treatise is basically one of a late twentieth century Hindu.

The Buddha's goal was essentially elimination of human misery. He claimed to have discovered the ancient Aryan path towards that goal. At the same time, he cautioned against the social aberrations of his time which were not conducive towards a total emancipation of the mankind. Thus, while his emphasis was on the spiritual path, the social factors were not ignored in his world-view. Very few scholars have drawn attention to the latter. An appraisal of the Buddha's message would remain incomplete if we merely highlight the pinnacle, *viz.*, his spiritual message, and not the base of the mountain, namely, his views on caste and privilege, struggle for social justice, family and social ties, duties of a householder and the *social* values of democracy and spiritual communism.

I

On Caste and Social Injustice

The institution of caste in the Indian or Hindu society is as old as the Vedic civilization itself. We find that from the beginning (the age of Ṛgveda), pro- and anti-caste sentiments ran parallel and fought an up-and-down battle with each other.

Thus, while the concept of universal brotherhood was preached, and it was declared that *One* Absolute was the origin of all living creatures, a category of Vedic poets emphasized diversity rather than unity amongst the human beings :

'The Brahmin was his (the Creator's) mouth, the Rajanya was made his arm, the Vaisya his thighs and Sudra sprang from his feet.''

(Rv. 10.90. 11-12)

The casteist bias in this composition is clear. That the Lord Himself created four castes was emphasized in the subsequent epochs, till we find the astounding statement in the Bhagavad Gita attributed to the Lord :

'Cāturvarṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭam'

—'the four-fold class was created by me' (Gita 4. 13) and later, 'the duties of Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas as well as of Sudras are well-divided according to the qualities born of their nature' (Gita 18. 41).

We also find in the Ṛgveda that the original concept of caste was merely that of division of labour. One composer states in the Ṛgveda: "I am a composer of verses, my father is a physician and my mother throws the corn upon the grinding stone. We are all having different occupations." (Rv. 9.112.3)

Thus, imbued with the spirit of liberalism, Viswāmitra, a king, wanted to be a Brahmin, a sage ; evidently, he did not believe (like the Buddha) in the divine origin of caste. When

Vaśiṣṭha, a 'true-Brahmin' hesitated to accept Viswamitra as his colleague, lot of resentment was generated, and some verses composed by the unhappy Viswamitra—later turned a Vedic seer and Brahmin—still bear testimony to the early caste-conflicts in the Indian society (Rv, 3.53. 21-24). Though there are scattered evidences of non-Brahmins like Viswamitra becoming Brahmins in the early Indian society, these facts were always resented by the casteists, the original Brahmins, who had propagated the 'divine' origin of caste. Evidently, it is one of those casteists who wrote :

> "Formerly only the Vasisthas knew the sacred words, hence only Vasisthas became Brahmins. But *since there is now sin at the present time*, anyone can study, and so at present anyone can become a Brahmin."
>
> (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 12.6.1.38 ff)

The casteist statements made in the Indian scriptures cannot be hidden. Upadhyaya has rightly commented that 'most of the Indian scholars feel embarrassed to face this truism'.[1] Radhakrishnan for example argues that *varṇa* in the Gita is based on psychological characteristics or *guṇa* (aptitude) and 'is not determined by birth and heredity.'[2] This interpretation is just not acceptable. Krishna exhorted Arjuna to fight since he was born as a ksatriya (Gita 2.31 & 32). Arjuna repeatedly spoke of war as an evil, since extermination of the men-folk would force the ladies to have inter-caste marriages, and the offspring of mixed blood or *varṇasaṁkaraḥ* 'cannot but lead to hell' (*narakāyai'va*) (Gita, 1. 41-43). Thus, *varṇa* did mean *hereditary* caste. Swami Vivekananda has also sometimes used the word 'caste' to symbolise division of labour, but was quick enough to repudiate hereditary privileges associated with it.[3]

Whereas the Gita strongly recommends that the hereditary (caste) professions should be followed (18. 41-49), even if these are defective (sadoṣam api—18. 48), the Buddha did not accept hereditary profession to be obligatory. The duties of a new-born baby must be determined partly by the previous-birth Karma of the spirit or *gandhabba* (Majjhima, 2.157). Hereditary restrictions or stipulations are unjust, because these do not take into account the free-will or natural inclinations of the human beings. In Esukari Sutra, the Buddha said that 'the (false) Brahmins lay down the four-fold virtue or conduct without the assent of recluses and true Brahmins'. This compulsion on the less-privileged sector of the society (Shudras were made to serve other castes, and not entitled to the Vedic studies) was like telling a poor destitute man, 'you must eat this meat, and must also pay a price for it'. (Majjhima, 2.181)

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[1] K.N. Upadhyaya, Early Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita, p. 499.

[2] Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavad Gita, pp. 160-161.

[3] Swami Vivekananda, Collected Works, Volume 3, pp. 245-246.

Whereas the terrible Manusmriti was decidedly anti-woman and anti-Shudra, the Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavata Purana sought to introduce some liberalism in the caste-ridden Hindu society. According to the Bhagavata Purana (1. 4. 25), this scripture as well as the Mahabharata were composed out of special consideration for women, Shudras and nominal Brahmins who had no access to the three Vedas. In the Gita, Krishna says (9. 32) :

> "Those who take refuge in me, attain to the highest goal—*though they may be lowly born, women, Vaisyas or Shudras.*"

Evidently, the Brahmins and Kshatriyas had better chances (Gita 9. 33), and the oppressive caste-structure was hereditary—women forming a special caste by themselves—from which the Gita wanted to relieve the devotees. No relief from casteism was promised to those who would not take refuge in the Lord. Quite appropriately, Upadhyay disagrees with Radhakrishnan, when the latter equates[4] Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita in terms of anti-caste liberalism. Upadhyaya writes :

> "The entire attitude of Buddhism in respect of caste is radically opposed to the traditional view of the Brahmanical ortho-

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[4] Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. 1, p. 526.

doxy whereas the Bhagavad Gita, in spite of granting certain concessions, is too conservative in its tone and spirit to break away radically from the traditional belief in the hereditary and hierarchical caste system."[5]

The Shudra was said to be created by God for the sake of serving others (Manusmṛti 8.413-414 and Gita 18.44). Brahmins should not recite the sacred texts in the presence of Shudras (Manusmṛti 4. 99). Thus the door of salvation was altogether closed to the Shudra.

It is astounding that Shankara quotes with great gusto, an old saying : 'Whatever Manu said is medicine'[6], and proceeds to defend the casteist injunctions of Manu, even in his treatment of Vedanta, which preaches unity of mankind and universal brotherhood! Chattopadhyaya elaborating on 'class contempt of Shankara' writes : 'Modern admirers of Shankara do not like us to raise such an impious question. But the question can hardly be evaded.'[7] Swami Vivekananda himself raised this question :

'Why should the Shudra not study the Upanishad ? The Acharya (Shankara) could not adduce any proof from the Vedas to the effect that the Shudra should not study the Vedas.'[8]

Shankara noted the claim of Shudras regarding Vedic knowledge being supported by *purvapakshin* or other Vedantic scholars (Treatise *on* Brahma Sutra or B. S., 1. 3. 34), but he himself refuted such claims, on the ground that the Shudras are not worthy of the ceremony of Upanayana (B. S., 1.3.25 and 1.3.36), and that Smriti prohibits their hearing the Veda. What an argument ! Then he approvingly quotes Manusmṛti :

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[5] Upadhyaya, reference 1, p. 512.

[6] Shankara *on* Brahma Sutra 2.1.2.

[7] Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, 'What is Living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy', Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 2nd Edn., 1977, p. 196.

[8] Collected Works, Vol. 6, pp. 208-209.

'The ears of him (a Shudra), who hears the Veda, are to be filled with molten lead and lac; a Shudra is like a moving crematorium (*chalamāna śmaśāna*), therefore the Veda is not to be read in the vicinity of a Shudra.'

Furthermore, Shankara produces a remarkable argument: 'From this latter passage (of Manusmṛti), the prohibition of studying the Veda results at once; for how should he (a Shudra) study scripture, if in his vicinity the Veda is not even to be read? Besides, there is an express prohibition, 'his tongue is to be slit if he pronounces it, his body is to be cut through, if he preserves it'.[9]

Ramanuja in his Sri Bhashya does not protest against the injunction by the *Smritis*, and merely records :

'The Shudras are allowed to hear Itihasas and Puranas (history and epics, but not Vedas). This is meant only for the end of destroying their sins, not to prepare them for meditation on Brahman.'[10]

Then, he proceeds to make a remarkable dig against Shankara's theory of absolute monism :

'The non-qualification of Shudras for the cognition of Brahman can in no way be asserted by those who hold that a Brahman consisting of pure *non-differenced* intelligence constitutes the sole reality, and that everything else is false.'[11a]

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[9] Shankara *on* Brahma-Sutra 1.3.38; Sacred Books of the East, Volume 34, pp. 228-229; Bādarāyana's Brahma-Sutra text reads : *śravaṇa adhyayana artha pratiṣedhāt smrteś ca*' ; see also Manusmriti, 4.80.

[10] Ramanuja, Sri Bhashya, 1.3.32, Sacred Books of the East, Volume 48, p. 339.

[11] Ramanuja in Sri Bhashya *on* the Vedanta or Brahma-Sutra, 1.3.39
(*a*) Sacred Books of the East, Volume 48, p. 343.
(*b*) *Ibid.*, Volume 48, pp. 344-346. Ramanuja's position is indeed anomalous. He writies : 'Real knowledge may result from non-Vedic instruction. And as the knowledge of Brahman may be

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What an irony ! What a painful reminder to the Vedantist that his concept of One Absolute is not consistent with the idea of a lower status for the Shudra !

Ramanuja himself was more interested in demolishing the theory of Vedantic monism and promoting the new movement of *bhakti* with members of all castes including Shudras in his fold than fighting against the casteist injunctions in the Smritis and Puranas from which his movement drew inspiration.[11b] That the Shudras are not qualified for the Vedic studies was accepted by him to be 'a settled matter.'[11a]

We are fortunate that the Buddha's spirit was re-incarnated in Swami Vivekananda, who cried out :

"Ramanuja, Shankara, etc., seem to have been mere Pundits with much narrowness of heart. Where is that love, that weeping heart at the sorrow of the others ?[12]....Shankara had not the slightest bit of Buddha's wonderful heart, dry intellect merely .. for the fear of the mob, he amputed the very arm itself.[13]...You,

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reached in this way, not only by Shudras but also by Brahmans and members of the other higher castes, the *poor Upanishad is practically defunct*' (p. 346) ! Ramanuja's spiritual inspiration is from the Gita which, providing the essence of the message in Upanishad, is *not* non-Vedic. There is no caste-injunction in the Upanishad ; on the other hand, the Gita does not seem to openly defy the Manusmriti.

The entire tradition of *bhakti* cult in India seems to have endorsed the idea, that caste structure need not be broken, and that it would *somehow* melt, through common allegiance and devotion to a personal God. Though hallowed by the appearance of a galaxy of brilliant saints, this tradition has given little thought to the *social* issues of the suffering untouchables, not conforming to the *bhakti* tradition, fragmentation of the Hindu society into Brahminic and anti-caste splinter groups, conversion to other religions and political disunity.

[12] Complete Works, Vol. 6, p. 394.

[13] Complete Works, Vol. 6, p. 227. Here the publisher (Ramakrishna Mission) adds as a footnote : 'it seems Swamiji could never forgive Shankara . . . for forbidding Vedic rituals to the shudras.'

the upper classes of India, you are mummies ten thousand years old ! It is among those whom your ancestors despised as '*chalamāna śmaśāna*', 'walking carrion' (*i.e.*, the Shudras) that the little of vitality there is still in India is to be found'[14]... Those 'moving corpses' of India—the Shudras, what is their lot in life?... There is hope. In the mighty course of time, the Brahmin and the other high castes, too, are being brought down to the lower status of the Shudras, and the Shudras are being raised to higher ranks."[15]

It is true that Shankara revived the wonderful thought-world of the Vedanta,[13] but he failed to give to it the human or compassionate touch of the Buddha. As a result, the country continued to remain within the clutches of the priestcraft. Ever since the Buddha's demise, the Brahmin editors of the Puranas and scriptures tampered with the original texts and repeatedly emphasized the obnoxious injunctions of the Manusmṛti. Jaiswal observes that whereas the original Nārāyaṇa tradition and the *pāncarātrasattra* cult had nothing to do with the role of priests, the casteist *varṇa* concept was integrated with the Nārāyaṇa-Viṣnu concept in the later versions of the epics.[16]

The Buddha's anti-caste exhortations[17] were not accepted by the Hindu society. Swami Vivekananda pertinently observed that India suffered socially and politically for not paying heed to the Buddha's advice and allowing itself to be exploited by its priestcraft.[18]

The Buddha pointed out that the prejudice of caste or clan is an obstacle in the way of salvation. It is clearly regarded as a bondage :

'Whosoever, Ambattha, is bound by caste-prejudices or clan-prejudices...is far removed from the way of the highest salvation.

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[14] Complete Works, Vol. 7, p. 326.

[15] Complete Works, Vol. 4, 467-468.

[16] Jaiswal, p. 35 and p. 166.

[17] Vide Chapter 4 of this book for additional references.

[18] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 5, p. 14.

'By casting aside the bond of caste-prejudices or clan-prejudices, Ambattha, the highest salvation is realised.'

(Digha 1.99-100)

Swami Vivekananda echoed similar sentiments :

'The caste is the greatest dividing factor and the root of Māyā; all caste either on the principle of birth or of merit is bondage' (Complete Works, Vol. 6, p. 394).

'Priestcraft is the bane of India. Can man degrade his brother, and himself escape degradation ?' (Complete Works, Vol. 4, p. 327). This evil system has precipitated socio-political consequences too :

'The Mohammedan conquest of India came as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor. That is why one-fifth of our people have become Mohammedans. It was not the sword that did it all...and one-fifth of your Madras people will become Christians if you do not take care !' (Complete Works, Vol. 3, p. 294).

Neither Swamiji nor the Buddha relished class-strife. Both wanted class-harmony.* Yet, they had the historical sense to declare that the onus for harmony rested with the privileged castes and classes. Swamiji said :

'The dissension between the castes is useless on both sides, *especially on the side of the higher caste*, the Brahmin, because the day for these privileges and exclusive claims is gone.' (Complete Works, Vol. 3, p. 297).

Let the modern India yet remember Lord Buddha's wry reminder that the slaves may become masters someday, unless we give up class/caste privileges and unite with each other in the true spirit of universal brotherhood (Majjhima, 2. 149).

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*The Buddha took pride in the fact that he had been a Kshatriya (Ambattha Sutta). He did not exercise his influence for a *total* abolition of caste system (Oldenberg : Buddha, pp. 153-154).

On Social Justice and the Issue of Non-Violence

We have made it clear in Chapter 4 of this book that the Buddha never recommended passive non-violence to the householders at the cost of social justice. In his anxiety to contrast the Bhagavad Gita with the early Buddhism, Upadhyaya wanted us to believe that 'the Gita concept of righteous war...is incompatible with the Buddhist ideal.'[19] It is true that the Buddha preached the philosophy of non-resistance towards even thieves and brigands (Majjhima, 1. 129), but this sermon, like most others, was addressed to the monks. His advice to General Siha (Simha) was to fight against the oppressor.[20]

The Buddha preached *ahiṁsā*, absence of hatred or jealousy, the golden principle of conquering anger and hatred by love (Dhammapada, 5. 223, etc.), but never taught that those who go to war in a righteous cause, after having exhausted all means to preserve the peace, are blameworthy. 'The Tathagata teaches a complete surrender of self, but he does not teach a surrender of anything to those powers that are evil....Struggle must be, for all life is a struggle of some kind.'

(The Gospel of Buddha, Paul Carus, pp. 116-120)

We are indebted to Buddhaghoṣa for commenting on the full conversation of the Master with the General (Simha) in his Explanatory Addition to the Pali Canon.

King Milinda raised this question of a king killing the guilty in the way of punishment. The Lord had recommended to a king : 'punish him (Vadha=kill) who deserves punishment', while recommending the principle of non-injury to the monks. The venerable Nagasena had to solve this 'double-edged' problem; being exasperated by this question, he said that the guilty dies in the hand of the king on account of his own Karma, and thus the Tathagata cannot be held responsible for this violence.[21]

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[19] K.N. Upadhyaya, Early Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita, p. 532.

[20] Vide this book, Chapter 4, for a detailed discussion.

[21] Questions of King Milinda, 4.3.35 ; Sacred Books of the East, Volume 35, pp. 254-257.

Notwithstanding his abhorrence for war in which both the victor and the vanquished suffer—the former morally and the latter physically—the Buddha yet distinguished between the aggressor, such as Ajatasatru (friend, helper and companion of evil) and the defender, such as Prasenjit (friend, helper and companion of goodness—kalyāṇamitto, Kalyāṇasahāyo, etc.).[22] When Bhaskara, the prime minister of Ajatasatru, told the Buddha about Ajatasatru's intention to attack the Vajjis in Vaishali, the Master warned :

> "So long as the Vajjis live up to the precepts of righteousness, *extend the rightful protection, defence* and support to the holy ones, the Vajjis may be expected not to decline, but to prosper... At Vesali, *I taught the Vajiis these conditions of welfare....*"[23]

Did the Master teach the Vajjis to surrender to the forces of Ajatasatru's army and thus uphold the philosophy of non-violence ? Did he himself avoid meat to conform to the said philosophy ?

Upadhyaya himself admitted that 'the true Buddhist ideal of absolute non-resistance in face of any provocation is extremely difficult to practise for the average ruler or householder.'[24] The fact is that the Master never preached non-violence (which is different from ahiṁsā) in absolute or unqualified terms to the householders.

Somehow, the myth has persisted. Aldous Huxley writes : 'Indian pacifism finds its completest expression in the teaching of the Buddha.... It forbids even laymen to have anything to do with the manufacture and sale of arms...with soldiering or the slaughter of animals.'[25] Maybe Huxley had Mahavira's teachings in mind. Even the Jainas, who have been more categorical about non-violence than the Buddhists, distinguished between *mahavrata*, the vow of absolute non-violence for the monks and *aṇuvrata*, minor vow for the householders. According to the latter, intentional violence has to be avoided, but the other three kinds of violence by the householders. namely, accidental, occupational and protective (as in self-defence) types, may not be avoidable.[26]

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[22] Samyutta Nikāya, 1.83.

[23] Mahāparinirvāna Suttanta, Digha Nikaya, 2.75.

[24] K.N. Upadhyaya, p. 536.

[25] Aldous Huxley, Ends and Means, Chatto & Windus, London, 1957, pp. 92-93.

The original Buddhists were even less categorical on non-violence particularly for the householders. Nagasena and Buddhaghoṣa recognised the necessities for the kings to defend their territories against the evil forces. Guṇavarman, a Buddhist monk from India, advised the king of Java (Indonesia) (middle of the 5th century A.D.) that to fight against a hostile enemy was not in contravention of the Buddhist law.[27] Buddhism has been somehow connected with the idea of total pacifism since the time of Ashoka. Attempts to contrast the Buddha with Lord Krishna have been misplaced, since both accepted *ahiṁsā* to be the highest virtue and also the right/duty of the householders to fight against the evil forces and protect the society by means, which need not be pacifist.

Swami Vivekananda was always particular in distinguishing between the Buddha's original teachings and the later-day distortions of his grand philosophy by the 'Buddhists'. Some Buddhists after Ashoka over-emphasized the principles of non-resistance to evil and non-injury. 'The idea is very great, but if all of us go out in the street and practise non-resistance, there would be very little left in the city. Nobody has yet found a practical solution (as to) how to attain it'.[28]

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[26] The Cultural Heritage of India, published in 5 volumes by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, second edition, Vol. 1, 1958, p. 409.

[27] 2500 Years of Buddhism, Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1956 (4th reprint, 1976), p. 83 footnote.

[28] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 3, p. 534, Mahatma Gandhi has tried this method without much success. His inspiration has been Tolstoy and Mahavira, and not Krishna or even Buddha.

'It is true that the Emperor Ashoka saved the lives of millions of animals by the threat of the sword, but is not the slavery of a thousand years more dreadful than that? Taking the life of a few goats as against the inability to protect the honour of one's own wife and daughter, and to save the morsels for one's children from robbing hands—which of these is more sinful ?...Forcing of vegetarianism...is one of the causes of the loss of our national freedom.'[29]

The Buddha's pronouncements on the social and governmental duties, as we would presently observe, went deeper than the absolutism of non-violence.

On Social Duties

It is tragic that the Buddha has been depicted to be an apostle for the monks only. His advice to the householders like Simha (discussed in Chapter 4) or Sigāla are rarely quoted. When the Master found Sigāla to perform a ritual of salutation with folded hands in six directions, he enquired whether Sigāla knew the significance of such a ritual, or he was merely bowing to some unknown Gods. Sigāla was not sure, and the Master explained that the 'Gods' in the six directions were :

parents in the east, teachers in the south, wife and children in the west, friends and companions in the north, servants and working people in the nadir and religious teachers on the zenith.[30] The duty of the householder is to serve and *protect* them. Employees and servants receiving appropriate food, wages, medical benefits and vacation, work well and praise the employers (Digha Nikaya, 3.191). One should 'give' heartily and not as if discarding something (*ibid.*, 2.357). 'The giving hand, the kindly speech, the life of service, impartiality (*samānattatā*)—these things make the world go round'. (*ibid.*, 3.192) (vide also, Jataka, 346, 453, 535 & Mahavagga, 6.227-228).

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[29] Swami Vivekananda, letter dt. 24.4.1897, Complete Works, Vol. 4, pp. 486-87. This view is fully shared by the Buddha and Lord Krishna.

[30] Sigālovāda Sutta, Digha Nikaya, 3.192. The Buddha's view on the importance of family ties and friendship has been discussed in Chapter 4.

The Duties of an Ideal Government

The Buddha has emphasized in Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Suttanta that an ideal ruler is one who respects and upholds the spiritual truth and fulfils two kinds of social obligations :

> to provide the right watch and ward and protection (*rakkhāvaraṇaguttiṁ*) to his own folk and the weakest (*antojanasmiṁ*), householders, monks, army (*balakāyasmiṁ*) and animals (migapkkhisu) etc. (Digha Nikaya, 3.61), and also,

> to ensure equi-distribution of wealth to prevent violence :

> 'from goods not being bestowed on the destitute, poverty grows rife (*adhanānaṁ dhane ananuppadiyamāne dāliddiyaṁ vepullam*, which leads to stealing (adinnādānaṁ), violence (*satthaṁ*) and murder (*pāṇātipāto*)' (Digha Nikaya, 3.68).*

It is clear, therefore, that according to the Buddha, the society must protect not only the animals, but also its citizens from external violence, using army if necessary (in self-defence), and prevent violence within its domain through egalitarian steps. The Buddha elucidated at great length, how the second task is more important than the first, and how the horrors of violence overtake a society, when poverty is rife ('*dāliddiye vepullam gate*'. It is strange that most scholars have failed to stress upon the Buddha's illuminating *pratītya-samutpāda* analysis of class deprivation and social violence (Digha Nikaya, 3.65-73). The Buddha is one with the author of the Gita, that the highest virtue of non-violence must be safeguarded through equality (*sāmya*), justice and protection of the virtuous.

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*Thus, human misery is traced to social inequality besides ignorance and desire. Swami Vivekananda has also stressed that 'ignorance, inequality and desire are the three causes of human misery, and each follows the other in inevitable union' (Complete Works, Volume 4. pp. 328-329).

The Buddha appreciated the spirit of democracy in the tribes of the Vajjis. He introduced similar tradition of democracy (group-decision, voting, etc.) as well as spiritual communism or group-living in his Order of monks and nuns. All the donations to him were marked for the 'present and future commune of the four directions' (*āgata anāgata chatudisāsu samghassa*). In Mahāvastu-avadāna, a ruler is called ganadasa, a servant of the people.

Though not a social reformer himself, the Buddha fully realised and proclaimed that the superstructure of a spiritual world can be built only on the solid foundation of a *just* and *strong* social order.

II

Search for Truth

The Buddha's approach to end the human misery has been rational and scientific to the core. To him, experience and logic were the two touchstones for genuine spirituality. It is accepted by all scholars that his biggest contribution to the Indian philosophy in the intellectual plane has been the theory of *pratītya samutpāda* or dependent origination, the principle of cause and effect in this phenomenal world of fluxes and changes.[31] Thus, there is no alternative to introspection and intellectual analysis at least in the *jñāna marga*, *i.e.*, the spiritual path of knowledge. In the Buddha's scheme of things, ritualism, esotericism and speculative metaphysics were of little spiritual value. Even the super-conscious experience never contradicts reason. "It transcends it, but contradicts it never'.[32]

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[31] G.C. Pande, Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 2nd Edition, 1974, p. 426, p. 557.

Very rarely do we find outside the domain of the Vedanta and the Buddha's message, that recognised spiritual authorities deny their authoritative positions. The Buddha was not anti-Vedic when he denied the ultimate authority of the Vedas. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad itself lays down (1.1.5) that the Vedic texts constitute *aparā vidyā*, *i.e.*, lower form of knowledge; experienced spiritual knowledge is the highest, *i.e.*, *parā*. Similarly, the Buddha asked his disciples to accept the spiritual truth not on the basis of his words but on the strength of their own earned experiences (Mahāparinirvāṇa Suttanta; Carus, p. 201). The concept of blind faith towards any scripture, creed or person, howsoever holy, was an anathema in his doctrine. Faith or *saddhā* is justified only by direct experience when it becomes *dassanamulikā saddhā*. His final advice was one of self-help: '*attadipā bhava*' 'Be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help'. Lion-like courage and moral strength made the Buddha deny the need for any personal God.[33]

When the Buddha humorously compared a devotee of Brahmā to one who has fallen in love with a girl whom he has never seen, he was merely emphasizing the futility of *bhakti* or devotion *without dhyana*, meditative search, and *jñāna*, experience-based knowledge. He was also aware that *bhakti* unalloyed with *viveka*, discrimination, may lead to dogmatism and fanaticism. Aldous Huxley has beautifully discussed how the cults of *bhakti* led to dogmatism of believers, and then to holy wars and persecutions of those who believe otherwise.[34] Recently, Swami Vivekananda has emphasized on the need of *jñānamiśrā bhakti*, devotion tempered by knowledge, discrimination and tolerance for other views.

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[32] Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, p. 166.

[33] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 3, pp. 529-530.

[34] Aldous Huxley, End and Means, pp. 242-245.

Quite aptly, Huxley characterizes 'Sakyamuni's religion as a combination of *karma marga* with *jñāna marga*'.[35] The Buddha has been the only prophet who refused to discuss about God and emphasized : "Do good and be good. And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is." In Swami Vivekananda's words, 'he is the ideal *karma yogi*, acting entirely without motive, and the history of humanity shows him to have been the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed'.[36] Symbolising in his words and deeds the Gita's spirit of motiveless work, the Buddha synthesized *jñāna* with *karma*, centuries before Christ and Vivekananda.

The Ultimate Reality & the Spiritual Path

That the Buddha's spiritual philosophy was essentially Vedantic or that of the Upanishads has not been understood by many, since he emphasized more frequently on the spiritual path rather than on his vision of the ultimate reality. Let it be firmly recorded that his monist view was of *one* existence (*sat*), whose essence is consciousness (*chit*) and bliss (*ānanda*). When he talks about 'desire' as the starting point of creation, he means desire in the 'Universal Mind'* which has been so beautifully described in the *Nāsadīya* hymn of Rg Veda (10.129) : "That One breathed calmly...within it first arose desire, the primal germ of mind... ." The Vedantic truth, '*Ekaṁ Sat, viprā bahudhā vadanti*'—'Existence is One, sages call it variously' (Rg Veda 1.164.46), was confirmed by him in his utterances '*Atthi bhikkhave ajātam abhutam asankhataṁ* (Itivuttaka)—'there is One unborn, unoriginating, uncreated and unconstituted'. This message is repeated in Udana (8.1-4). It is clear that by *Nirvāṇa* he meant identification with the One, the Absolute or

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[35] *Ibid*, p. 243.

[36] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 117. The Buddha nursed, with his own hands, Tissa, a monk at Sravasti, suffering from a malignant skin disease. Swami Vivekananda recalled such glorious deeds of the Buddhist era, while initiating his philanthropic mission. Complete Works, Volume 8, p. 407.

*'*satto lolajātiko ; sattā ābhassarakāyā manomayā sayaṁpabhā antalikkhacharā subhaṭṭc̄yino*'—Agganna Suttanta, Digha Nikaya, 3.48-85.

sat-chit-ānanda. In Surangamā Sutta he says that *Nirvāṇa* is identical with the World-Mind, and in Dhammapada he repeats that Nirvana is bliss—'*Nibbānam param sukham*'.

The Oneness of the entire Creation being the cardinal feature in his philosophy (as in Vedanta), the Buddha had little sympathy for the idea of individuality of souls. He knew the true nature of *Ātman* (the Universal Soul), and therefore harped on the theme 'what is not soul', *i.e.*, *anātman* or *anattā* (in Pali). The delusion that ego is soul was considered by him to be the evil spirit of selfishness, and greatest hindrance in not only spiritual but also ethical ascent of Man. 'How to kill the self (ego) ? Become perfectly unselfish, ready to give up your life even for an ant. That was the Buddha's message'.[37] 'There is one Self, not many. That one self shines in various forms. Man is man's brother because all men are one. A man is not only my brother, say the Vedas and the Buddha, he is myself. Hurting any part of the universe, I only hurt myself'.[38] 'There is but one basis of well-being, social, political or spiritual—to know that I and my brother are *One*'.[39]

Universal Sympathy—the Path as well as the Goal

The basic (Vedantic) philosophy or world-view of the Buddha remained somewhat muted or implicit in his statements, and yet it became transparent that universal sympathy with the entire Creation was his goal as well as the means to attain it. High philosophy was blended with heart. Let us quote Swami Vivekananda elaborating on this theme :

"The religion of Buddha spread fast. It was because of the marvellous love which, for the first time in the history of humanity, overflowed a large heart and devoted itself to the service not only of all men but of all living things...a love which did not care for anything except to find a way of release from suffering for all beings.[40]

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[37] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 8, p. 99.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 350.

"What Buddha did was to break wide open the gates of that very religion which was confined in the Upanishads to a particular caste. What special greatness does his theory of Nirvana confer on him ? His greatness lies in *unrivalled sympathy.* The high orders of Samadhi, etc., that lend gravity to his religion are almost all there in the Vedas; what are absent there are his intellect and heart, which have never since been paralleled throughout the history of the world."[41]

It may be noted that after the Buddha, other Prophets such as Christ, Mohammed, Chaitanya and Ramakrishna, etc., have expanded the theme of universal love—the essence of religion—and combined this with the principle of *bhakti,* love for a personal God with attributes. Yet, the monistic framework in the Vedanta and the Buddha's message have not been abandoned : 'My Father and I are one', '*Brahmāsmi*', 'Jiva is Shiva' and so on. Recently, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have combined the paths of *bhakti* with *jñāna* and *karma* by propounding the excellent philosophy that to serve Man is to serve God. The basis is again Vedantic, since Man is God.

It is clear, therefore, that spiritual welfare has to take place for the whole of mankind which is a *social* entity, and thus the issue cannot be divorced from the question of *social* welfare. To try to interpret the Vedanta or the Buddha's message in any other way would be an intellectual exercise in futility.[42]

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[40] *Ibid.,* pp. 99-100.

[41] *Ibid.,* Volume 6, pp. 225-226.

[42] Swami Vivekananda ridiculed the suggestion that service, charity and doing good to the world belong to the domain of *māyā* or delusion, by counter-suggesting that if that were so, then attempts for earning spiritual salvation or *mukti* should also be considered as *māyā,* since, 'the self is ever-free' according to the Vedanta, vide Reminiscences, pp. 320-21.

III

The Twin Tragedy out of Ignoring the Vedantic Base of Buddhism

The Buddha's message was essentially Vedantic. Max Muller observes that, 'Buddhism is the highest Brahminism popularised, everything esoteric being abolished, the priesthood replaced by monks, and these monks being in their true character, the successors and representatives of the enlightened dwellers in the forest of former ages'.[43] Swami Vivekananda asserts the fact that 'every one of Buddha's teachings is founded in the Vedantas. He was one of the monks who wanted to bring out the truths, hidden in those books and in the forest monasteries. Original Buddhism was an attempt to combat caste and priestcraft'.[44]

It has been a twin tragedy that Hinduism was not sufficiently reformed in the light of the Buddha's Vedantic view on the one hand, and on the other, the later-day Buddhism drifted away from its Vedantic roots. Let us examine the stated phenomenon in some detail.

Shankaracharyya resurrected in the Indian soil the Buddha's Vedantic philosophy but not his Vedantic heart and 'unrivalled sympathy'. Shankara refuted the views of the other schools of Vedanta—'*asmadiyās ka kekit*'—which propounded the concrete existence of individual soul. The concepts of distinct elements of plurality within *Brahman* and of a supreme *personal* God advocated by Bodhāyana and other authorities of Vedanta, and later supported by Ramanuja, were logically refuted by Shankara.[45] Thus, Shankara toed the line of the Buddha's philosophy. Furthermore, he was indebted to the Mahayanist Nagarjuna's Madhyamika philosophy in asserting *māyāvāda*, 'the unreality of the phenomenal plurality,' which has not been elaborated in the Upanishad to any great length.[46]

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[43] Max Muller, Last Essays, Second Series, 1901, p. 121 quoted by Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Volume 2, Second Edition, Eighth Impression, p. 29.

[44] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 2, p. 509. Swamiji also adopted the same 'campaign' of 'bringing out the truths of the Upanishads from the forest and the possession of selected bodies of people and scattering broadcast all over the land'—'vide Volume 3, p. 221.

In practical terms, Shankara 'learned from the Buddhist Church that discipline, freedom from superstition and ecclesiastical organisations help to preserve the faith clean and strong'.[47] 'He perceived the advantage of cenobitic life for organizing religion and founded a number of Maths or Colleges. Shankara's approval, both in theory and in practice, of the monastic life is Buddhistic rather than Brahmanical'.[48] It is not surprising, therefore, that the proponents of qualified monism held the view that Shankara was a Buddhist in disguise and his *māyā-vāda* crypto-Buddhism.[49]

Shankara wrote his salutations to the Buddha (quoted earlier in Chapter 5) 'let the great saint Buddha shine in my heart', and yet indulged in unfair personal criticisms against the saint to whom he was personally indebted. Referring to the contradictory positions of the different schools of Buddhist philosophy, and granting that this could have arisen on account of the 'difference in (intellectual) capacity on the part of the Buddha's disciples', Shankara ends up by blaming the Buddha himself :

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[45] Sacred Books of the East, edited by F. Max Muller, 1962 reprint, Volume 34, pp. xxi-xxxi.

[46] The Cultural Heritage of India, Volume 1, p. 506 & pp. 592-594 ; also vide 'The Vedantic and the Buddhist Concept of Reality as Interpreted by Shankara and Nagarjuna', by R.C. Jha, published by Firma K.L.Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1973.

[47] Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Volume 2, p. 447.

[48] Charles Eliot, Hinduism and Buddhism, Volume 2, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Reprinted 1971, London, p. 175 & p. 211.

[49] Yāmunācharyya in Padma Purana, quoted by Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. 2, pp. 470-471; Bhāskara on Brahma Sutra, 1.4-25 ; Madhva Vijaya, 1.51.

"Buddha by propounding the three mutually contradictory systems (did he ?—author) has himself made it clear either that he was a man given to make incoherent assertions (was he ?), or else that hatred of all beings (?) induced him to propound absurd doctrines by accepting which they would become thoroughly confused. Buddha's doctrine has to be entirely disregarded by all those who have a regard for their own happiness."[50]

Shankara typically represented the ambivalent Hindu attitude towards the Buddha—respect on the one hand and aversion on the other. The Buddha was declared to be an Incarnation who came 'to confuse the demons by giving anti-Vedic sermons!' (Bhagavata Purana 11.4). And what were the demons going to do according to the Bhagavata Purana (11.4.22-23) ? 'They were going to perform Vedic Yajna to which they were not entitled!' The cat of casteism and Brahminic privilege is out of the bag ! Just imagine a saint being called an Incarnation, and then his anti-caste exhortations ridiculed. We are not surprised at Shankarcharyya's intellectual duplicity when we recall how he surrendered, quite abjectly, to the nauseating caste-injunctions of Manusmriti (vide the earlier discussion in this chapter, and the cited reference no. 9). We may also recall in this connection, a comment made by Radhakrishnan : 'It is said, not without truth, that Brahminism *killed* Buddhism by a *fraternal* embrace'.[51] The saying is either ill-coined or cynical, since 'fraternity' is not quite connected with the idea of 'killing' a brother; there is the unmistakable evidence of an undercurrent of cynicism and malice in the quoted saying.

Fortunately for us, the Hindus of the twentieth century, Swami Vivekananda has re-established the proper perspective on the above issue :

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50. Shankara's Commentaries on Brahma Sutra, 2.2.18, 2.2.28 & 2.2.32. Sacred Books of the East, Volume 34, pp. 401, 418 & 427-428. Can a hero stoop so low as to tarnish the image of another hero ? Most Indian scholars have evaded this question by ignoring the quoted remarks.
51. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Volume 2, Second Edition, Eighth Impression, p. 470.

"The Lord once more came to you as Buddha and taught you how to feel, how to sympathise with the poor, the miserable, the sinner, but you heard Him not. Your priests invented the horrible story that the Lord was here for deluding demons with false doctrines ! True indeed, but we are the demons, not those that believed. And just as the Jews denied the Lord Jesus and are since that day wandering over the world as homeless beggars, tyrannised over by everybody, so you are bond-slaves to any nation that thinks it worth while to rule over you."[52]

"No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. The Lord has shown me that religion is not in fault, but it is the Pharisees and Sadducees in Hinduism, who invent all sorts of engines of tyranny in the shape of doctrines."[53]

"You have the greatest religion which the world ever saw, and you feed the masses with stuff and nonsense. You have the perennial fountain flowing, and you give them ditch water."[54]

The Hindu society had the most ideal Vedantist in the Buddha, and yet 'heard Him not'.

The Buddhist Drift from the Vedanta

The other half of the twin tragedy in India has been the mistake committed by the followers of the Buddha in not appreciating the fact that the Master was against the ritualism of the Vedas, but not against its philosophy, moral or ethics as contained in the Vedanta, the quintessence of the Vedas. The ancient

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[52] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 5, p. 14 written more than fifty years before the creation of Israel and independence of India.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 15. The Pharisees and Sadducees are still with us. The evil of untouchability still exists. Shall a non-Brahmin spiritual personality be accepted as the Head of the Order of Shankaracharyya ? The author does not know.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

Aryan path, '*Sanātana Ārya Mārga*, to which the Buddha submitted his allegiance, was the very root of Buddhism, and yet this fact was overlooked by his disciples and later-day followers. Sri Aurobindo observed :

> "Buddhism seemed to reject all spiritual continuity with the Vedic religion...(whereas)...Buddhism could easily have claimed for itself a Vedic origin... . But what hurt Buddhism and determined in the end its rejection, was not its denial of a Vedic origin or authority, but the exclusive trenchancy of its intellectual, ethical and spiritual positions... . It was a high creed but not plastic enough to hold the heart of the people."[55]

Swami Vivekananda had said very much the same thing, when he characterised true Buddhism as 'the fulfilment of Hinduism' in one of his famous lectures at the 1893 Parliament of Religions :

> "On the philosophic side, the disciples of the Great Master dashed themselves against the eternal rocks of the Vedas and could not crush them, and on the other side, they took away from the nation that eternal God to which every one, man or woman, clings so fondly."[56]

Swamiji was however quick to point out the twin nature of the tragedy :

> "But at the same time, Brahminism lost something—that reforming zeal, that wonderful sympathy and charity for everybody, that wonderful leaven which Buddhism had brought to the masses."[57]

The Communication Barrier

There was a communication barrier between the early Buddhists and the contemporary Brahmin intellectuals. This

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55. Sri Aurobindo, Complete Works, Volume 14, pp. 150-151.
56. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 22.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

was, in part, a language barrier. The Buddha's message was spread rapidly through Māgadhi or Pali, the dialect of the people. The author does not agree with Swami Vivekananda when he charges that the Buddha 'stopped the Sanskrit language from being studied by the masses'.[58] The language was being refined (*saṁskrita*) by Panini and others only during his time. Written texts were still not available, and the Vedas would not be recited in the vicinity of the Shudras for them to listen. Nevertheless, it is true that the later-day Theravadins or Hinayanists developed a disdain for the Sanskrit literature. The Mahayana scholars however wrote in Sanskrit, and many of them were proficient in the classical Sanskrit scriptures. Let it also be noted that the Brahminic scholars did not care to study Pali, which was pretty soon forgotten in India. During the fourth century A.D., Buddhaghosa had to go to Sri Lanka to unearth and resurrect the golden literatures in Pali. The modern studies on Buddhism were heralded in the nineteenth century by the European scholars in Pali.

Ancient India paid a heavy price in not nurturing the languages of the masses (like Pali) and the language of culture (Sanskrit) at the same time. The communication barrier has also been partly psychological or ideological.

While the Brahmins erred on the issue of caste, the Buddhists (since Ashoka) stumbled on the question of non-violence, and forgot that the Buddha did not formulate any absolute viewpoint regarding the practice of non-violence or timid pacifism by the householders. In Swami Vivekananda's words 'nobody has yet found a practical solution as to how to attain it'[59] (the great idea of practising non-resistance in the social level).

If India, which has produced the Buddha, has erred in several ways, other Buddhist and non-Buddhist countries have done no better. At least India has never attacked another country, nor has it launched religious wars or waves of religious persecution.

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[58] *Ibid.*, Volume 3, p. 291.

[59] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 534. Gandhian brand of non-violence is neither Buddhistic nor in accordance with the Gita. Its *practical* success lies in the womb of the future.

Swami Vivekananda was disillusioned with the brand of militant Buddhism in Sri Lanka.[60] Similarly, in the last letter, written twenty days before his death, he wondered how there could be great monks and nuns in Japan, unless it cultivates the sacred ideal of inviolability of marriage and perfect chastity. He further observed that 'modern Buddhism—having fallen among races who had not yet come up to the evolution of marriage—has made a travesty of monasticism'.[61] During the Second World War, fascist Japan attacked China and prayed for victory in the name of the Buddha ! Poet Tagore wrote to Yone Noguchi, a Japanese poet : 'wishing your people whom I love, not success but remorse'. The Christian and Mohammedan nations have hardly advanced the cause of world-peace, so ardently preached by their respective Prophets.

Thus the Hindu India represented by the Buddha still continues to be the major hope for the future of an ideal human civilization.

An Appeal for Synthesis

Swami Vivekananda sought to rectify the twin tragedy referred to earlier, and appealed in his famous Chicago speech delivered on 26th September, 1893, for an ideological synthesis :

"Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism... . The Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist... . Let us then join the wonderful intellect of the Brahmins with the heart, the noble soul, the wonderful humanising power of the Great Master"[62]

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[60] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 7, pp. 505-506.

[61] *Ibid.*, Volume 5, p. 180.

Elsewhere, he elaborated on the same theme :

"This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands... . This will be the religion of the future, and if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be *for all times and peoples*."[63]

Swamiji's vision is gradually taking shape, and there has been indeed a grand revival of the Buddhistic studies in India. 'Nowhere else in the world does one find a parallel case of religion being revived centuries after its disappearance, not by the command of a despot, but simply because it is will of the people'.[64] The tussle on the question of ownership and management of the Buddha Gaya temple is over,[65] and we have entered into a new phase of spiritual syncretism. Let us hope that a genuine and enduring ideological synthesis shall take place between Hinduism and Buddhism, 'the fulfilment of Hinduism'. Let the resurgent India demonstrate Swamiji's pertinent observation : 'Buddhism apparently has passed away from India, but really it has not'.[66]

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[62] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 23.

[63] *Ibid.*, Volume 2, p. 140. Italics are mine.

[64] 2500 Years of Buddhism, p. 402.

[65] 2500 Years of Buddhism, pp. 408-414. The interminable litigation between the Buddhists of the world and the Shaiva Mahant, representing Giri sect of the Order of Shankaracharyya and formerly having the physical possession of the Temple, had produced no result. Swami Vivekananda wanted to use his influence in settling the dispute, but the death intervened (vide 'A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda' by S.N. Dhar, Part 2, pp. 1476-77).

The Government of Bihar intervened after India attained independence, and under the Buddha Gaya Temple Act of 1949, a Management Committee, consisting of four Buddhists and four Hindus, has been constituted to look after the temple.

[66] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 8, p. 102.

IV

The Eternal Buddha-Bodhisattva

Gautama, son of Śuddhodana, bestowed two attributes to himself: the *Buddha* (the Enlightened) and a *Bodhisattva* (a spiritual aspirant whose essence or firm resolve is Enlightenment). He also commented that these words signify states and not individuals; furthermore, there have been, and there shall be many Buddhas, and therefore many Bodhisattvas. Thus, we end up with the panoramic view of an eternal procession of saviours, saints and spiritual aspirants in the expanse of time. This ennobling idea is something unique in the entire spiritual history of mankind.

The Buddha never called himself an 'Incarnation', since he did not approve of deifying any individual. But he did say that he was a Buddha, one of the *Saptarshis*, one amongst many spiritual messengers in the past, present and future. Jaiswal observes that 'the identification of Narayana with Vasudeva gave birth to the theory of Incarnations, which was further developed under the influence of the Buddhist doctrine of the Bodhisattva, and it fostered a hopeful belief in the coming of a saviour'.[67] The Bhagavad Gita echoes the idea of many Buddhas in its own syncretistic fashion : the Single Divine Entity promises to appear repeatedly on the human society from age to age—'*saṁbhavāmi yuge-yuge*' (Gita 4.8)—thus outwardly there shall be many Prophets representing the same Divinity. Then again, multiplicity of religious views is superbly accommodated within a single framework :

'*ye' py anyadevābhaktā*
...te'pi mām eva...yajanty...' (Gita, 9.23)

'even those who are devotees of other Gods are worshipping Me only'.

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[67] S. Jaiswal, The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1967, p. 214.

Thus, idea of a single human Prophet or Saviour is ruled out, and at the same time, the question of intolerance amongst the followers of different Prophets or Gods is also eliminated. The doctrine of Incarnation 'accommodated polytheism within a monotheistic framework (the Absolute is One) and thus served as a powerful integrating force.'[67] Aldous Huxley draws our attention to the remarkable fact that 'because Christians believed that there had been only on *Avatar* (Incarnation), Christian history has been disgraced by more and bloodier crusades than has the history of Hinduism and Buddhism'.[68] Modesty has prevented Huxley to name other religions (apart from Christianity to which he belonged), which also propagated the theory of a single Prophet and indulged in the persecution of the 'unbelievers'.

The Buddha's Concept of a Saviour

The Buddha was averse to the notion of an *individual* Saviour or of an *individual* being saved, since his Vedantic sense led him to repudiate the concept of individuality itself. In other words, 'salvation' meant, according to him, a total salvation of the entire living world—a process towards which everybody must contribute. One has to earn spiritual enlightenment himself, and then enlighten others. This is the Bodhisattva spirit, the crux of the Vedantic message of the Buddha, salvaged by the Mahayana movement from the debris of self-centred monasticism.

Intense love for the entire living world is the path as well as the goal according to the Buddha. The other name for *Nirvāṇa* is *Brahma Vihāra*, the merger with the World-Mind. Even after reaching *Nirvāṇa*, an ideal saint 'lets his mind pervade the entire world with love, far-reaching, grown great and beyond measure'. (Tevigga Sutta, 76)

In Sutta Nipata, this all-pervasive love for the entire living world is compared with the mother's love for her child : '*mātā yathā nijam putram*'.

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[68] Aldous Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy, 1946, pp. 60-62.

Bodhisattva's passion to save the whole world before accepting his own salvation has been immortalised not only in the Jataka stories and countless Mahayana scriptures, but also in the touching utterances of Rantideva in the Bhagavata Purana (9.21.12) : "I do not desire personal salvation or the charms of a heaven, where I cannot serve a man. I wish to share and relieve the misery of all living creatures."

The Buddha exhorts us all to adopt the Bodhisattva path of loving-kindness and become Buddhas, spiritually enlightened, to help others. This is the ancient Aryan Path leading to the human destiny of universal salvation. The Buddha's appeal : '*Ye suttā te pabbujjatha*' (Itivuttaka) was an echo, a rejoinder to the ancient Vedic sage's call to the mankind (Kaṭha Upanishad, 1.3.14) : 'Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata'—'Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the excellent ones'.

Concluding Remarks

The Buddha discovered the ancient spiritual path to end human misery. This path is based upon *śīla* (ethics), *pravrajya* or *tyāga* (renunciation of worldly base desires), *dhyāna* and *samādhi* (spiritual practices) leading to *prajnā* (spiritual wisdom) and *Nirvāṇa* (identification with the World-Mind). The goal of *Nirvāṇa* is also suggestive of the path to be followed, namely, abandonment of all notions of ego, individuality or selfishness.

Emphasizing that *mukti* or salvation has to be total instead of individual,[69] the Buddha brought to the focus the scientific, universal and egalitarian spirit of the Vedanta. The social implication of egalitarianism is inseparably connected with the lofty spiritual message of the Vedanta and the Buddha.[70]

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69. Swami Vivekananda has also stressed this idea. Radhakrishnan writes: '*Sarva-mukti* means the liberation of all. *Brahma-loka* implies corporate salvation. In a deeply spiritual sense there can be no other salvation.' Vide The Brahma Sutra, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1960, p. 218.
70. Vide Swami Vivekananda's discourses on 'Vedanta and Privilege', Complete Works, Volume 1, pp. 417-436.

The human Buddha or Bodhisattva is *not* an other-worldly phenomenon.

Considering Vedanta to be the quintessence of the Hindu thought-world, we fully appreciate the comment made by Professor T.W. Rhys Davids : 'Gautama Buddha was born and brought up and lived and died a Hindu'.[71] Let the Hindu world live up to the spiritual vision of one of its greatest sons, and lead the world into a new era of universal religion imbued with the spirit of a mother's love, tolerance and sacrifice.

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[71] Quoted by Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Volume 1, Second Edition, Eighth Imvression, 1966, p. 361.

APPENDIX

Ten Bodhisattva Gems

In Chapter 4, it was pointed out how the Bodhisattva anecdotes illustrate the human Buddha and his divine message; in doing so, the author was tempted to narrate the details of many of these anecdotes. This was not done in order to maintain a smooth flow of the discussion in the said chapter.

Each one of the 547 Jataka stories is indeed a gem, and the voluminous texts can hardly be condensed without introducing some distortion. Nevertheless, brief notes are now being presented on ten such gems, which have been already referred to in the fourth chapter.

I. Dūta Jataka (260)

The Buddha told a greedy disciple that he was going to be beheaded in one of his previous births.

The greedy disciple was born as a brahmin in the kingdom of Varanasi, where Bodhisattva reigned as the king. Bodhisattva was very dainty in his eating, and used to have his luxurious dinner in presence of a large attending public.

On one such occasion, the greedy brahmin posed as a *dūta*, messenger from another king, and shouting 'I am a messenger', ran towards Bodhisattva who was having his meal. In accordance with the custom, the '*dūta*' was allowed immediate and free access to the king.

Everybody was aghast in finding the impostor grabbing food from Bodhisattva's plates and swallowing. The swordsmen were about to behead him, when the king Bodhisattva refrained them from doing so, and allowed the '*dūta*' to have his full meal first.

Then, Bodhisattva asked the man, whose message did he bring, and the brahmin replied that he was a messenger from Lust and the Belly !

"O king, the Belly's messenger you see :
O lord of chariots, do not angry be !
For Belly's sake men very far will go,
Even to ask a favour of a foe.
The Belly holds beneath his puissant sway
All men upon the earth both night and day."

Bodhisattva agreed that all creatures are messengers of the 'Belly' and

"One messenger may to another give;
For Belly's messengers are all that live".

The episode also illustrates the fine sense of humour that the Buddha possessed.

II. Illīsa Jataka (78)

Matsari Kaushik was a miserly multi-millionaire living in Sarkaranigam near Rajagriha. He made no use of his vast wealth, either for his family or for sages : 'it remained unenjoyed like a pool haunted by demons'.

One day, he saw a person eating rice-cake, and then asked his wife to prepare this stuff exclusively for himself in the seventh floor of his palace with great secrecy. Miles away, the Buddha contemplated to reform this miser by supernatural means. Accordingly, he sent his disciple Maudgallayana to perform an act destined to be humorous and also noble.

Maudgallayana appeared on the scene, where the cooking was going on, by supernatural means. The miser was more irritated than surprised, and asked his wife to prepare a small piece for the monk. However, a little dough in the cooking pot swelled to be a big cake. Fresh efforts gave the same result, and then, the exasperated miser asked his wife to donate any one piece to the monk. It was found now, that all the cakes had stuck together and could not be detached even by the strongest pull from both sides.

The miser burst into perspiration; now his craving left him, and he asked his wife to donate the cakes, basket and all, to this ascetic. At this stage, Maudgallayana taught the merchant and his wife about the evil of miserliness and the fruits of charity. He brought the couple to the monastery, where the donated food 'grew' to be sufficient for the 500 monks. The Buddha accepted the converted couple as his disciples, and told the audience of a similar episode, a previous birth-story, Illisa Jataka (78).

The Master also recited the famous verse included in Dhammapada (Pushpa varga, 49) advising how monks should approach the householders :

"*Yathāpi bhramara pushpan barnagandham ahethayam*
palāyati rasamādāya ebam grame munī charet"
"Like bees, that harm no flower's scent or hue
But, laden with its honey, go away,
So, sage, within the village walk thy way"

(Cowell, I, p. 197)

This second story, like the first, depicts the gentle humour leading to noble thoughts. The Buddha's sermon in verse is also reminiscent of the Hindu ideal of monks often quoted by Swami Vivekananda :

"basantabat lokahita charantam"—the sages aiding the people like the spring.

III. Chandra-Kinnara Jataka (485)

Once upon a time, Gautama and Yaśodharā lived in one of their previous births, as fairies, Chandrā kinnara and Chandrā kinnarī in a Himalayan peak: 'mountain of the moon' or Chandrā parbata.

During a summer season, they came down and enjoyed themselves around a mountain stream. They covered each other with flowers, anointed themselves with perfumes, played music on bamboo flute and sang melodiously with honey-voice. At that time, a king came for hunting, fell in love with Chandrā's beauty, and shot her husband with an arrow to gain the lady's hand.

Chandra, shot by the arrow, gradually lost consciousness, feeling sorry for the bereavement and more for his wife, who would suffer the most. When the king offered to marry Chandrā, she cried, 'loud as a lion's roar' :

"No ! I will surely slay myself !
thine I will never be,
Who slew my husband innocent
and all for lust for me"

The king moved away from the loyal wife, who went on lamenting :

"Blue are the Himalaya hills,
most fair they are to see :
What shall I do, O fairy mine,
now I behold not thee ?"

By God's grace, and through his wife's nursing, Chandra regained consciousness. They decided to move away from the paths of naughty men. They went up the hill reciting :

"To the mountain let us go,
Where the lovely rivers flow,
Rivers all overgrown with flowers :
There for ever, while the breeze
Whispers in a thousand trees,
Charm with talk the happy hours."

Narrating this beautiful and romantic previous birth-story, the Buddha remarked to his father about Yaśodharā :

"She has ever been faithful to me in the previous births. It is no marvel, great king, that now in my last existence the lady should love me, and should be of faithful heart and led by me alone."

IV. Ghata Jataka (454)

The Buddha narrated this anecdote while consoling a lay disciple, who had lost his son. What is most interesting in this Jataka story, is that Bodhisattva was born as Ghata pandita, younger brother of Vāsudeva, Lord Krishna of Gitā fame, and consoled his elder brother, who had lost a son. An equally fascinating aspect of this anecdote is the unconventional version of the Vāsudeva story.

Mahakamsa, a king in the city of Asitanjana, had two sons, Upakamsa and Kamsa, and a daughter, Devagarbhā. The astrologers predicted that one of her sons would destroy the Kamsa lineage. So, Kamsa, as the king, confined his sister in a tower under the care of a serving-woman Nandagopā and her husband Andhakavishnu. Upasāgara, a prince from the upper part of Mathura, happened to be Upakamsa's friend; he fell in love with Devagarbhā and married her. Their first child was a girl, named Anjanā, and hence she was spared by Kamsa from death.

Eventually, they had ten sons: Vasudeva, Baladeva, Chandradeva, Suryadeva, Agnideva, Varunadeva, Arjuna, Pradyumna, Ghata-pandita (the Bodhisattva) and Amkura. It so happened that during these ten births, Nandagopā had ten daughters born and they were exchanged with Devagarbha's sons, so as to save the latters from Kamsa's wrath.

The ten brothers (daśa-bhāi) led by Vasudeva grew up as Nandagopā and Andhakavishnu's sons. As mighty warriors, their identities were soon revealed to Kamsa, who 'invited' them to a wrestling bout in his capital.

Baladeva killed two famous wrestlers, Chanura and Musthika, and then Vasudeva 'threw a wheel (reminiscent of *Sudarśana chakra*) which lopped off the heads of the two brothers' (Kamsa and Upakamsa). 'The crowd, terrified, fell at his feet, and besought him to be their protector.'

The ten brethren, having slain their two uncles, assumed the sovereignty of the city of Asitanjana. They conquered Ayodha and then proceeded to Dvārāvati which had mountain on one side, and sea with an off-shore island on the other. With great valour they conquered Dvārāvati (Dwaraka) and settled there with their sister Anjanā.

The story went on to narrate Vasudeva's loss of a son, when his younger brother Ghata pandita (Bodhisattva) consoled him by saying that, just as it is absurd to get the 'moon's celestial hare', so it is impossible to have the departed near and dear ones brought back alive.

Drunkenness and rivalry weakened, and internecine civil war ruined, the tribe of Vasudeva (similar story of the Yadavas in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa).

Later, Vasudeva, Baladeva and Anjana left their kingdom and arrived at the forest of Kālamattrikā (the two brothers and the sister are still worshipped in the Jagannath temple at Puri). While Baladeva was killed by a wrestler, Vasudeva was inadvertently shot dead through a huntsman's poisonous arrow.

While this Jataka story resembles the account of Krishna Vasudeva, one wonders how much substance exists in the *deviations* from the conventional story.

V. Kaṇavera Jataka (318)

Once upon a time, Bodhisattva was born as a bold and strong dacoit in Varanasi. He was also 'comely and gracious to look upon'. The citizens were exasperated on account of his dreadful exploits. Ultimately, the governor had him arrested, and made arrangements to execute him in accordance with the royal order.

A courtesan *Śyāmā* or Shyāmā was the darling of the executives in the city. She saw the arrested Bodhisattva and fell in love with this beautiful dacoit. The governor would not mind obliging her in return of a suitable bribe, but he wanted a substitute who could be executed 'to keep the records straight'.

At this stage, a rich young merchant, who was enamoured of Shyāmā, was duped. The governor executed him as a substitute and set Bodhisattva free. The dacoit enjoyed Shyāmā's company for a few days. Then he felt that Shyāmā could have him also executed if necessary, and therefore she was dangerous. He strangled her and ran away with her ornaments. Shyāmā was not dead; regaining consciousness, she sent a message to the dacoit entreating him to come back. Bodhisattva sent back his terse reply :

"Me too Shyāmā would betray
Were I not to flee away".

Thus rebuffed, Shyāmā 'took once more to her old course of life'.

The Buddha told this story to one of his monk disciples who continued to be sexually tempted by his wife, earlier deserted by him in quest of spiritual truth. The Master told him that his wife was Shyāmā in the previous birth, and he was the foolish young merchant who lost his head through the mesmeric effect of sex.

The Nobel laureate poet, Tagore, did not emphasize this moral, while using the Kaṇavera Jataka (Kaṇavera=red Karavi flower; criminals used to have a wreath of kanavera flowers put on their neck while they were led to the execution ground) for the text of his dance-drama entitled 'Shyāmā'. He transformed the dacoit (in his story) to be an innocent merchant and the young fool to be a platonic and romantic lover. Bodhisattva did break away from Shyāmā's love, but later had second thoughts. Different aspects of emotional love have been emphasized in Tagore's narrative. Evidently the poet did not like the monastic warning against the dangers of sex. To him, the fulfilment of love between the opposite sexes was far more important.

VI. Sudhābhojana Jataka (535)—the second part

The first part of this Jataka narrates how a miserly merchant was converted into a sage Kausika, who would not take any food without sharing a part of it with others.

The second part deals with an allegorical story as regards the best of the four values in human life : Śri (wealth, glory), Āshā (hope), Sraddhā (faith, often blind or dogmatic, in this story) and Hrī (modesty, bashfulness, sense of honour, spiritual discrimination, etc.). These four 'ladies' happened to be the daughters of God Indra. The sage Narada induced a quarrel among them as to which sister was the best. He asked them to find this out themselves by approaching the sage Kaushika who was living in his Himalayan hermitage. The sage was known to 'eat nothing without sharing it with another'. The naughty Narada arranged to send a cup of Ambrosia to Kaushika, and simultaneously the four ladies arrived before the sage, requesting him to share the food *only with the best* among them.

The sage Kaushika considered their cases one by one. When 'Sri' (wealth, glory) introduced herself, and talked about her virtues, Kaushika exclaimed how unjust and partial she would often be :

"Men may be skilful, virtuous, wise,
Excel in all their wits devise,
Yet without thee, they never succeed;
In this I blame thy evil deed.
"Another slothful, greedy, see,
Low-born and ugly as may be :
Blest by thy care and rich withal
He makes one nobly born his thrall"

(Cowell, V, p. 213)

Then came 'Hope' to claim Ambrosia, and she was told :

"In *hope* their fields the farmers plough and till,
Sow seeds and labour with their utmost skill;
But should some plague, or drought afflict the soil
No harvest will they reap for all their toil.
Deceiver of mankind, thy suit is vain,
Thy idle craving for this boon restrain"

Then 'Faith' came forward, and claimed herself to be the 'man's honoured friend'. But even she was not spared* :

"Through faith at times men freely alms dispense,
Show self-control, restraint and abstinence :
At times again through thee* from grace they fall,
Slander* and lie and cheat and steal withal".

Last came 'Hri' (modesty, conscience, etc.) who was too modest to claim her honour, and she was adjudged the best amongst the sisters :

"Maidens that still within their homes live,
ever guarded well,
Women now past their prime,
and such as still with husbands dwell,
In one and all should fleshly lust
within their heart arise,
At Hri's voice they check the thought
and sinful passion dies"
"Where shafts and spears in battle's van
are hurtling fast and free,
And in the rout when comrades fall
or turn them round and flee,
At Honour's voice they check their flight
even at the cost of life,

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*Śraddhā, Viswas and Bhakti are indeed covetable virtues according to the Indian tradition. However, the Buddha thought that these must be tempered by logic, scientific analysis and absence of dogmatism ; otherwise, 'faith' becomes dogmatism and blind faith. The latter is the seed for communal slander and disharmony amongst people subscribing to different faiths or denominations.

And panic-stricken as they were
Once more renew the strife"

(Cowell, V, p. 217)

Thus the sage Kaushika summed up :

"Glory' to me appears a partial jade
While 'Faith' proves an inconstant maid,
'Hope' ever a deceiver loves its promise to betray,
'Hri'* along is established firm in holy virtue's way."

VII. Kurudharma Jataka (276)

Once upon a time, Bodhisattva happened to be a Kuru king at Indraprastha, and the prosperity in his kingdom was attributed to the sense of righteousness cherished and cultivated by *all* people in his kingdom. At that time, there was a severe drought in the city of Dantapura (Dantan ?) at Kalinga (Orissa). The brahmins of that city came to Indraprastha, to find out what principles of righteousness (*Kuru-dharma*) were being followed in the land of Kuru, to avoid drought and other calamities. They found out that the usual moral codes were being followed in the society of the Kuru kingdom, with a remarkable sense of discrimination or self-introspection, so much so, that none in the kingdom was fully satisfied with his or her normally commendable moral stature.

The king Bodhisattva was unhappy that once he had shot an arrow inadvertently which killed a fish. The queen-mother had remorse in her heart that once she was slightly partial to one of her two daughters-in-law. Bodhisattva's wife, the queen, admitted that she had admired the beauty of her husband's brother, and even this thought, which had flashed in her mind just for a moment, troubled her conscience.

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*Cowell has translated 'Hrī' as 'Honour'. We have retained the original Pali/Sanskrit word, since it implies much more than bashfulness, modesty or sense of honour. It denotes spiritual discrimination as well.

Equally conscientious and virtuous were the other people in the kingdom, such as the family priest, the charioteer, the treasurer, the porter and so on. The most striking example was that of a city courtesan.

Once the God Indra wished to test her conscience. He came disguised as a brahmin customer before the courtesan, gave one thousand coins as fee, and then left asking her to wait till he returned. She waited for three years in vain without receiving any other customer. When all the money had been spent, and she had suffered prolonged starvation, she approached the judge of the city asking him what should be her 'righteous' course of action.

The judge told her that since she had waited for more than three years, she was free to receive other customers. When one young man approached her with one thousand coins, she stretched her hand to receive the money, and at this stage Indra re-appeared as the earlier customer. The courtesan immediately identified the first customer, refused to entertain the second, and what was most striking, lamented that 'before she had *earned one wage*, she held out her hand for another'!

The God praised the courtesan's conscience and the country which could produce such conscientious people as exemplary.

This story clearly illustrates how *hri* and *vivek* are synonymous. A person who is striving to cultivate utmost conscience (*vivek*) regarding righteous (*satya*) way of life (*dharma*), must also be bashful and modest (*hri*) ; instead of bragging about the virtues possessed, he or she should rather endeavour to rectify even the minor lapses, and consider that there is scope for further progress in one's spiritual life.

VIII. Mahā Sutasoma Jataka (537)

The story of Angulimala, the man-slaughterer dacoit, turned saint by the Buddha, has been told earlier (Jataka, 537 and also Majjhima Nikaya, 86). Even after his conversion, he was feared by the villagers and did not easily get the necessary alms. Gradually his sainthood became evident and he was recognised as one of the eight great monks in the Buddhist Order. The Buddha narrated the previous birth story, when as Sutasoma, a Kuru king, he reformed Angulimala born as Srahmadatta, king of Varanasi turned a man-eater.

As princes, they studied together at Taxila, when Bodhisattva (Sutasoma) observed that Brahmadatta's love for meat might lead to cannibalistic tendency. This is exactly what happened later.

As a king, Brahmadatta was excessively fond of meat. One day, his cook was rebuked when no meat was available in the market. In desperation, the cook went to the cremation ground, brought some meat from the thighs of a dead man, cooked the same, and served it to the king. Brahmadatta liked it immensely, and turned to be an eater of human flesh to such an extent, that the cook had to murder human beings from time to time to serve the king and retain his job !

The citizens got panicky at the frequent murders in the city, and ultimately caught and drove the cannibal king out of his kingdom. Then the king Brahmadatta became a dacoit like Angulimala.

The cannibal dacoit vowed to catch 101 kings, murder and eat them. With 100 kings thus imprisoned, the last victim turned out to be Bodhisattva or Sutasoma, the cannibal's own boyhood friend. Sutasoma was known to be virtuous and truthful. He told his friend Brahmadatta that he had an appointment to keep with a brahmin who had wished to narrate to him the Kashyapa verses 'on the fruits of holy company'. Sutasoma promised that he would come back, after keeping the appointment, and let himself be murdered by his friend !

The cannibal trusted his saintly friend in letting him go, and the latter proved his trustworthiness by coming back to sacrifice his life. The puzzled friend was deeply influenced by the holy company of Sutasoma. He was indeed moved and reformed, so much so, that he let all the 101 kings free and vowed to give up cannibalism. To crown it all, the great (Mahā) Sutasoma led Brahmadatta back to the latter's kingdom, pacified the angry citizens and relatives of the ex-cannibal king, and helped his king to renew a moral and virtuous life.

Note : 1. Towards the end of the story in the Jataka, the cannibal is suddenly referred to as 'Kalmāshapāda'. It may be recalled that an Ikshaku king Mitrasaha Saudasa offered human flesh to the great sage Vasistha, and was then cursed to be a cannibal demon. The king indeed devoured 100 sons of Vasistha, and wanted to curse the sage with a bowl of hot water. However, good sense prevailed and the king dropped the hot water on his own feet—whence he became known as Kalmāshapāda or 'Variegated-feet'. The king was then reformed by the sage (Ramayana, 7.57.10-13; Mahabharata, 1.166.1-1.168.65).

The near-identity between Bodhisattva and the sage Vasistha is further hinted through Vasistha's emotional link with king Saudasa's queen Madayanti (compare Mahabharata, 1.113.21-22 and 1.173.1-24 with Unmadayanti Jataka, 527).

2. There is surprising modernity in the story of a cannibal king. Jean Bedel Bokassa, the dictator ruler of the Central African Republic (1965-1979), was later charged as the 'Butcher of Bangui (capital)'. He had massacred 200 schoolchildren who did not buy school uniforms from the shop owned by his family.

His palace cook, Philippe Linguissa later testified that he used to be ordered by Bokassa to fetch headless male body from the palace deep-freeze, empty it of intestine and stuff it with rice. The body was then cooked in a type of baker's oven. Mr. Linguissa testified in the court at Bangui, that he saw the dictator eat from the body (Amrita Bazar Patrika, December 26, 1980, Foreign News entitled "Bokassa sentenced to death in absentia").

IX. *Mahākapi Jataka* (*407*)

The Buddha was ever ready to sacrifice his life for fellow-creatures and the entire humanity. This divine tendency was manifest even in his previous births as animals. In the Śaśa (Hare) Jataka (316), we find Bodhisattva as a hare sacrificing himself as food for the guest. In Mahākapi Jataka (407), he is the glorious leader of a retinue of eighty thousand monkeys.

The story goes that the monkeys used to live on the Himalayan bank of the Ganges, enjoying the delicious fruits of the mango trees. A king came from Varanasi with his archers to taste the sweet fruits, and when he found that the monkeys on a mango tree were doing the same, he ordered his archers to surround the tree and kill the monkeys.

Bodhisattva, the leader of the monkeys, wanted to save his kith and kin. He stripped a long bamboo shoot (*vetralatā*), fastened one end of it to the tree, the other end around his thighs and gave a big jump across the Ganges. He failed to reach the tree on the other side properly, but could just seize a branch firmly with both hands.

Then, he beckoned his troop of monkeys to cross the river over the bridge formed by the long bamboo shoot and finally tread over his hanging body to safety. All the monkeys crossed over to safety, and a naughty one amongst them (Devadatta in previous birth) even gave fatal parting kicks.

The king from Varanasi was astounded, having witnessed this supreme act of sacrifice. He saluted Bodhisattva, the dying leader of the monkeys, brought him down, nursed him, and then asked :

> "You made yourself a bridge for them
> to pass in safety through :
> What are you then to them, monkey,
> and what are they to you ?"

Bodhisattva replied :

"Victorious king, I guard the herd
I am their chief and lord
I fear no pain of death,
bonds do not give me pain,
The happiness of those was won
over whom I used to reign."

In his dying moments, Bodhisattva delivered an eternal message to the king, and through him, to all the future rulers of the world :

"A parable for thee, O king,
if thou the truth would'st read :
The happiness of kingdom
and of army and of steed
And city must be dear to thee,
if thou would'st rule indeed"

(Cowell, III, p. 227)

The king made royal arrangements for Bodhisattva's funeral and built a shrine in his honour. The one who 'made himself a bridge' for his fellow-creatures to cross over, has been immortalised in the Bharhut sculpture (*Stupa*) (vide Cunningham's Stupa of Bharhut, plate 33, figure 4 ; also Tawney's explanation, Proceedings Asiatic Society of Bengal, August 1891)

X. (*Vessantara*) *Vishwantara* Jataka* (*547*)

The last of the 'ten Bodhisattva gems', chosen for this chapter, corresponds to the last (547th) Jataka—the story of the penultimate birth of Bodhisattva, before he finally emerged as the Buddha.

Bodhisattva was born as Vishwantara*, king Sivi's grandson. King Sanjay and queen Phusati were his parents, Mādri the wife, Jāli and Krishnājinā his son and daughter, respectively. Those 60,000 who would become Gautama Buddha's followers in the next birth were also born as Vishwantara's playmates and companions. Bodhisattva had the same persons as his parents, wife and son in the next birth; the daughter became the chief nun, Utpalvarṇā.

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*We have indicated earlier why the name Vishwantara is preferred to the Pali 'Vessantara'.

Even as a child, Vishwantara was very fond of donating riches to the needy. He had insatiable thirst for sacrifice.

> "When I was yet a little boy,
> but of the age of eight,
> Upon my terrace, charity
> and gifts I meditate
> If any man should ask of me
> blood, body, heart or eye,
> Without hesitation, only with pleasure,
> I'd give him, was my cry."

When he became the prince, married princess Madri and had Jali and Krishnajina as son and daughter, Bodhisattva continued his noble practice of giving away his dearest treasures to the needy. Once there was a severe drought in the kingdom of Kalinga (Orissa), and the brahmins from that part came to Jetuttara (capital of Sivi kingdom), and begged for the auspicious elephant (*mangalahasti*), possessed by the kingdom, which might give them luck. Without any hesitation, Bodhisattva gave it away, much to the consternation of the citizens of Jetuttara, who considered the auspicious elephant to be the chief source of their peace and prosperity.

The citizens demanded expulsion of the over-charitable prince from the kingdom, and the king Sanjaya agreed much against his own sentiments. Princess Madri was firm to accompany her husband to the forest along with their two children.

Bodhisattva faced the situation with great equanimity. As a matter of fact, he distributed all his possessions before moving out of the capital with his family. When he moved out of the capital on a chariot drawn by four horses, he came across five brahmins, on the road, who begged from him :

> "Then did four brahmins catch him up
> and for the horses plead :
> He gave the horses on the spot—
> each beggar had one steed.
> A fifth came thereupon,
> and asked the chariot of the king :
> He gave this also, and his heart
> to keep it did not cling"*
>
> (Cowell, VI, p. 265)

Vishwantara walked on foot with his family, and reached his maternal uncle's Cheta kingdom. He refused to stay there amidst luxury, and moved on to the foothill of Gandhamādana mountain with his wife and children.

There, he lived blissfully like an ascetic for seven months, his wife and children living in a separate hut. At that time came a terrible brahmin named Jūjaka (Indian children know him as the terrible '*Juju*'), whose wife Amitratāpanā had pestered him to get some slave labourers for her. While Bodhisattva's wife was away for collecting food and fuel, the brahmin came and begged Bodhisattva to donate his children.

Vishwantara realised that the supreme moment had come in his life, when even as an ascetic he had to live up to the highest standard of philanthropy, he had earlier set for himself. With tearful eyes and a broken heart, he decided to donate his darling children to the brahmin, and reach the highest spiritual truth through the noblest sacrifice. He asked his children :

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*A sculpture on limestone at Goli, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, shows Vishwantara driving a bullock cart and then, asked by the brahmins, giving up the bullocks and then the cart too (Govt. Museum, Madras).

"Come hither, my beloved children,
my perfect state fulfil;
Come now and consecrate my heart,
and follow out my will.
Be my ship to ferry me
safe over existence sea,
Beyond the worlds of birth and gods
I'll cross and *I'll be free*."

He saw his children being rudely taken away by the greedy brahmin, and when his wife came back, narrated the terrible act of charity that he had performed.

This was not the end. A god came in disguise to test Bodhisattva, and requested him to donate his wife. When Bodhisattva tearfully agreed, the god revealed himself, and offered a few boons to Bodhisattva. Vishwantara prayed that in his next birth he should earn *nirvāṇa*.

This was the turning point in the story, which turned from tragedy to comedy. Jujak and the two children lost their way, and reached the Shibi kingdom where the king Sanjay got his grandchildren released through donation of money and slaves to Jujak. The king and his followers went to the mountain and brought back Vishwantara and Madri. As if to commemorate his memorable re-union of the virtuous people, there was a magical shower, *Pushkar Varshā* : 'who wished to be wet were wet, and those who did not, not a drop of rain fell upon them, but the water ran off as it runs from a lotus leaf.'

As Vishwantara, Bodhisattva reached the highest moral step—that of philanthropy and selfless sacrifice—just a step below the ultimate spiritual Enlightenment, *nirvāṇa*.

The next Bodhisattva story is that of Gautama Buddha himself. The Bodhisattva stayed in Tushita heaven before 'descending' to become the Buddha. The second century B.C. sandstone relief at Bharhut (now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta) depicts Bodhisattva as an elephant approaching the sleeping figure of the mother, Mahāmāyā from above. The inscribed label above the medallion reads : *Bhagavato ūkraṁti*—'the descent of the Lord'.

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